

OF CLOUDS AND BODIES:  
FILM AND THE DISLOCATION OF VISION IN BRAZILIAN AND JAPANESE  
INTERWAR AVANT-GARDES

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*Of Clouds and Bodies: Film and the Dislocation of Vision in Brazilian and Japanese Interwar Avant-gardes* examines the political impact of film in conceptualizations of the body, vision, and movement in the 1920s and 1930s avant-gardes of Brazil and Japan. Through photographs, films, and different textual genres—travel diary, screenplay, theoretical essay, movie criticism, novel—I investigate the similar political role played by film in these “non-Western” avant-gardes in their relation to the idea of modernity, usually equivalent to that of the “West.” I explore racial, political, and historical entanglements that emerge when debates on aesthetic form encounters the filmic medium, theorized and experienced by the so-called “non-Western” spectator. Through avant-garde films such as Mário Peixoto’s *Limite* (1930), and Kinugasa Teinosuke’s *A Page of Madness* (1926); the theorizations of Octávio de Faria and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō; and the photographs and writings by Mário de Andrade and Murayama Tomoyoshi, this dissertation follows the clash between the desire for a universal and disembodied vision, and the encounter with filmic perception. I argue that the filmic apparatus, as a technology and a commodity, emphasizes an embodied and localized experience of vision and time that revealed the discourse on cultural-historical

difference—the distinction between West and Rest, or modern and non-modern—as a suppressive modulator of material power dynamics embedded in racial, class, and gender hierarchies enjoyed by the cosmopolitan elite in the “peripheral” spaces. The temporality of filmic perception becomes a problem for the avant-garde program of “moving forward.” The dissertation is punctuated with images that traveled across national territories, building a political theory of the technical image that takes into consideration the experience of a displaced spectatorship: transnational, in racially marked bodies, and within discourses of historical belatedness. Comparing two disparate spaces through a mobile medium that represents movement, I explore the possibilities and limits of nation-bound comparison and area studies, while contributing to debates in film and media theory.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Comparison and World-Mapping: the modern problem of film*

It has become a common discourse in the twenty-first century that new media have shortened distances and consolidated what Marshall McLuhan famously called the “global village.” This dissertation looks back at almost a century ago, to the 1920s and 1930s, when a similar discourse circulated across different continents with the establishment of new medium of film and its moving images. One very basic premise of this dissertation is that new media always carry with them promises and fears of radical change of space-time relations that disorganize our understanding of the world and its social relations.

The perceptual shift caused by the technical image of film and photography has been widely theorized in what are now canonical works of critical theory from the twentieth century. In Europe, during the 1920s and 1930s, Walter Benjamin’s work, alongside his fellow Frankfurter Siegfried Kracauer, have been crucial to argue for the political implications that media technologies introduce to the human sensorial apparatus.<sup>1</sup> Emerging media make clear that the body is implicated in many ways in the political shaping of the world. Different forms of experiencing and theorizing time, the public sphere, perception, and the process of capitalist commodification were brought about by the technical image and the culture industry that flourished through

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, *Illuminations*, 2007; and Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, 1995.

it. I take these as a starting point, in order to inquire how these perceptual changes worked in the geopolitical imagination of the modern world mapping, its epistemic and material separations, and what sort of political-theoretical proposition they allow for.

In the early twentieth century, with the development of the filmic apparatus and its industry, film raised a number of hopes, desires, and frustrations in relation to the way non-“Western” nations were placed—temporally, politically, culturally—in the world-mapping. On the one hand, for the white metropolitan spectators, film’s evidentiary power worked to confirm their modernity, feeding into the curiosity for “primitive” and distant subjects to be captured and abstracted into the Eurocentric modern mapping; on the other hand, those same “primitive” subjects that were filmed and brought as image to the metropole were themselves spectators who saw the images of Hollywood and European cinema as an evidence of their belatedness, creating a sense of longing for a modern future that, albeit coeval, was felt as geographically distant. Filmic eloquent indexicality legitimized difference by giving it visibility—it reaffirmed a certain world-mapping by being a machine that provoked comparison.

But the division between modern and Other, “Western” and “non-Western” is not self-evident and devoid of its own political nuances. It is important to remember that the handling of anthropological difference and the teleological discourse on modernity is usually carried out not only by the metropolitan powers, but also by local cosmopolitan elites, who saw themselves as local representatives of the modern ethos and its new mode of life. In this sense, this dissertation understands that the discourse

on cultural-historical difference—the distinction between West and Rest, or modern and non-modern—functions to suppress material dynamics of power embedded in racial, class, and gender hierarchies that surpass national boundaries. Epistemic and anthropological difference usually have their material implications in forms of capital accumulation, labor abstraction, and political subjugation. A claim that is latent throughout the chapters is that such a power dynamics also inform the avant-garde as a practice and as an idea, especially when it is displaced and travels to the peripheral spaces as a mode of discourse and an object of desire, serving as a tool for the modernizing paradigm to be implemented within the avant-garde discourse.

Looking into various objects, genres, and media—photography, film, literature, theoretical essay, travel diary, screenplay, manifestoes—I argue that the new perceptual experience brought about by cinema operated a potential disruption of the anthropological difference that film’s very circulation promoted. It, at once, confirms and questions the metaphysics of identity. Bringing to a critical dialogue film-phenomenology, theories of the image, Marxist critique, and critical race theory, I pursue the instances in which these two poles—the aesthetic experience and commodification of the visible—are in tension. This tension is precisely what opens up the space for political dislocations and frictions.

Such a space is related to what I call, in chapter one, the “anthropological ambivalence” that film did not create, but emphasized as a particularity of the position occupied by the peripheral avant-garde: the cosmopolitan elite that, through the encounter with film, encounter themselves as the Other to the modern they desire to be. In Brazil and in Japan, this means being *and* not being “the tropical” and “the

Oriental,” the colonizer and the colonized, categories of difference that carry also geographic, historical, and racial connotations.

This “anthropological ambivalence” feeds into the desire for *universality* that emerges in several objects analyzed here as a *promise* enabled by film. Be it in the speculations on the future of the medium by Octávio de Faria and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō discussed in chapter one, the avant-garde filmic experiments *Limite* (directed by Mário Peixoto, 1931) and *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta Ichipēji*, directed by Kinugasa Teinosuke, 1926) in chapter two, or the theories and images of Murayama Tomoyoshi and Mário de Andrade in chapters three and four, the desire and impossibility of a universal humanity defines a field of tensions and anxieties established by the relation between perception, image, and the apparatus of film. The fact that the novelty of film was related to its promise of a universal type of perception appear, in different modulations, in all chapters. And that is precisely where and when *vision* and *perception* become political issues attached to the relation between technology, image, and body.

### *Vision, Movement, Body*

What does it mean to see? This question is another important thread to navigate the debates in this dissertation. The objects here analyzed usually mobilize, oscillating or modulating, two discourses on vision that make up their “geopolitics of perception.” The first one is the *body/eye split*, part of a modern hierarchy of the senses that privileges sight over the other senses. Because seeing is an activity that can be done from afar, the paradigm goes, it would be more suitable for reason and its

analytic faculties. The myth of objectivity, which informed the scientific endeavor that paved the way to photography and cinema, is also the myth of the superiority of visibility. This paradigm is also a discourse on the body, whose flows of desires and sensations would be seen as an impure obstacle to knowledge.

Silent cinema provided an experience that seemed to accommodate such desire for a pure visuality. In chapter one and chapter two, the theories and films discussed are in direct relation to such a project of purification of vision. Octávio de Faria, Mário Peixoto, and Kinugasa Teinosuke were defenders of a modern visuality that excluded the “intrusion” of the verbal—written or in sound—into the realm of the visual. Subscribing to the hierarchy of the senses, they saw film as an opportunity to reaffirm and refine the separation of the eye from the body, producing an experience of transcendentality and atemporality that was seen, at the same time, as the epitome of modernity.

Such an aesthetic-sensorial split had a geopolitical task for them. If the cosmopolitan elite felt the burden of locality—being “tropical,” “Oriental,” non-modern—filmic visuality was seen as an opportunity to achieve a universality in the sensorial dimension, as a liberation from the restrictive and localized body, stuck in the periphery in space and time. As I discuss in chapter one, Octávio de Faria provides a sophisticated theorization of film as a producer of a disembodied eye and a universal life, drawing from a particular reading of Henri Bergson’s philosophy of movement and duration, to which Tanizaki Jun’ichirō presents an alternative through his material understanding of the filmic image and its sensorial impact on the body.

The dissertation follows the encounter with the body, even in the occasions where the body was unwelcome, through the temporality of perception. It thus argues that filmic perception provides a privileged site to examine the temporal delay intrinsic to perception, which is produced by the mediation of the body, since the assemblage of movement happens precisely *because* one frame merges with another: they overlap because perception *takes time*. The defining aspect of the medium—its capture of movement—is also what makes it important to think the temporalities of the body, rather than being an evidence for the immediacy of the technology. In chapter two, where I read closely the two most notorious (sometimes seen as the only ones) avant-garde films from the silent era in Brazil and Japan, Mário Peixoto's *Limite* and Kinugasa Teinosuke's *A Page of Madness*, this disjunctive temporality of embodied perception emerges through the desired atemporal purified visuality.

Following the eye/body split, since vision is bourgeois, detached, and disembodied, the second paradigm claims that it would be necessary to reject visuality altogether in order to build a political art. The *seeing/acting split* represents a fundamental question for the development of political avant-gardes in the twentieth-century—film and other arts, in Europe and United States, but also in Brazil and Japan.<sup>2</sup> To see, in this sense, would be the opposite of *to do*. This paradigm could be traced back to Plato's critique in the myth of the cave, and has found important echoes

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<sup>2</sup> See Pedro Erber, *Breaching the Frame: the Rise of Contemporary Art in Brazil and Japan*, 2015, for an account on the problem of participation in Brazil and Japan 1960s avant-gardes. About film, see Yuriko Furuhashi's *Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics*, 2013, on the problem of participation in the 1960s and 1970s Japanese filmic avant-garde.



in twentieth-century thought and art, to name a few, in Hannah Arendt's political theory, Soviet formalism, post-1968 international avant-gardes, guerilla cinema, and still constitutes part of the guilty consciousness displayed by politically engaged film theory. In this dissertation, such a paradigm is most emphatically represented by Murayama Tomoyoshi, discussed in chapter three, but its implication finds echoes in all chapters.

According to this paradigm, seeing would be a passive activity of “only looking,” something that political art needs to fight against. This has created the occasional demand that one does not *merely* see but touches and feels, as in theories of haptic visuality, which, on their flip-side, bring back in different clothes the 1970s paradigm that affirms that only looking is not enough (when they do not overtly deploy the Orientalist division of tactile primitive / optical modern that finds its most notorious iteration in Aloïs Riegl's theory of haptic visuality, with echoes in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's model of the nomadic hapticity).<sup>3</sup> What could be seen as opposite to the *eye/body* split is actually its development. Here in this dissertation, I take the opposite route and affirm, by a counter-reading, that filmic perception shows that by *only looking* important political dislocations take place.

Through the shift that filmic perception brings to the experience of movement—a movement that is constituted within an immobile body—the injunction

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<sup>3</sup> Aloïs Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry*, 1985; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 2009. See, on haptic visuality and the paradigm of the Laura Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, 2002; Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 2000; Jennifer Barker, *The tactile eye: touch and the cinematic experience*, 2009; Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media*, 2014.

to motor action is also displaced. In Murayama Tomoyoshi, as we see in chapter three, the demand of action is modulated by the understanding of one's racialized body and the filmic movement on screen; whereas in Mário de Andrade, the filmic situation finds an analogy in the malarial gaze of the Amazonian body, opening a different politics of seeing that requires a type movement that is not contingent upon the acting, but rather the not-acting and "just looking." Filmic perception functions to highlight that the freedom of movement is, itself, a privilege granted to the bourgeois avant-garde subject, subsumed in the structures of capital circulation and the modern world-historical mapping.

### *Structure by chapter*

In Chapter One, I look into two theorizations of the future of film. Octávio de Faria, in Brazil, and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, in Japan, wrote imaginative theories for the future of a medium that seemed to be coming from a foreign, "Western" modernity. They produce two radically different propositions for a theory of the moving image, each having the place of the body as a central problem. Faria, a conservative intellectual, turns to Soviet theory as a non-Western model for the development of film in Brazil, but erases all revolutionary politics from it. A devotee of the image in opposition to the verbal, he theorizes an "absolute visuality," purified from both politics and the body, in a transcendental and universal mode of image that only film would enable. Modernist writer and film enthusiast Tanizaki, on the other hand, proposes an understanding of the filmic image centered on the close-up, highlighting film's sensorial disorientation that stems from its interruptive material qualities: the

fact that it is made of photograms, which enables film to be captured by commodity fetishism. Tanizaki understands the filmic image as a diffuse object, whose movement comes into being by the interruption of light by the screen, thus residing in the spectator's body and desires. Faced with the racialization of the Asian body and the "complex of whiteness" that the commerce of film had brought to the Japanese screens, Tanizaki's material theory of the image is fully contingent upon the acknowledgment of the body and of capitalist material relations. The chapter thus provides two theoretical strategies that have the body—its absence or presence—as a central piece to different politics of time and image. These two poles set the main framework for the following chapters.

Chapter Two turns its attention to two films—*Limite*, by Mário Peixoto (1931), and *A Page of Madness*, by Kinugasa Teinosuke (1926)—balancing film analysis with readings of other materials related to the films, in dialogue with film-phenomenology. The two films occupy a very particular place both in national and world film history: they are considered the first and only experimental avant-garde films of their countries, they were both lost for decades, and they have always been received with astonishment and perplexity. These "fossils of the avant-garde" have been exposed to several layers of discourses that placed them as avant-garde objects precisely for the fact that they seemed very similar to avant-garde European cinema. Both films follow vague plots that deal with situations of physical restriction: a boat adrift in the sea, and a mental hospital. Interestingly, both have the very act of filmic vision as an object of fascination, which is conveyed by the way they experiment and manipulate their own material constitution—or their own "film-bodies," a term borrowed from Vivian

Sobchack—to highlight the autonomy that the camera and the montage provide to the phenomenon of sight as independent from the human body. They were also both products of modernist aesthetic agendas—the Chaplin Club in Brazil, and the New Perception School (*Shinkankakuha*) in Japan—that advocated for a modern aesthetic form that would produce direct, immediate, and pure forms of address. I read them as experiments on vision that push to the limit the capacity of film to capture movement, producing a “masochistic spectator” that *waits* for a full visibility only to be frustrated. Once again, their political proposition comes precisely from their failure to fulfil immediacy, revealing that the temporality of perception entails a delay that is the temporality of the spectator’s body.

Chapters Three and Four establish a dialogue around the question of movement and political action. In Chapter Three, I read the political aesthetic theory of Japanese avant-garde multimedia artist and theorist Murayama Tomoyoshi, who was at once against and fascinated by film. Murayama’s theory of art placed the physical presence of objects and bodies as central for art to be political, a feature that cinema lacked. Paradoxically, however, it is through film that Murayama states the belatedness and un-modern aspect of Japan and the Japanese bodies, which, simultaneously, places him as the racial Other but also as the cosmopolitan intellectual entitled to teach his nationals how to improve towards modernity. By reading him against Vilém Flusser’s theory of the technical image, which proposes indeterminacy as its central characteristic, I see how, in Murayama’s late texts on filmic sensorial realism and its unsettling relation to history, his encounter with filmic movement goes counter to his

demand of a will to act and move history forward, dislocating the place of agency through the immobile experience of duration.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I read film essays, aesthetic theory, and the last novel written by avant-garde intellectual Mário de Andrade, along with the travel diary and photographs he produced in his ethnographic trip to the Brazilian and Peruvian Amazon. One of the few of his generation to pay attention to film, Andrade was also caught in the place of the peripheral intellectual with the mission to modernize his nation. An active member of the Brazilian avant-garde and a public intellectual, he was engaged in ethnographic explorations of Brazilian folklore that would inform the project of bringing modernity to Brazil. Closely looking at his photographs, his travel notes, and his theoretical writings, I follow how he finds in photography a mode of filmic vision that he theorizes as the “malarial gaze”: a “cloud-like” dialectical immobile-mobile gaze that is an embodied uptake of the world. I argue that impact of the photographic and filmic mediation in Andrade disrupts his initial endeavor to map the primitive in the backlands of Brazil and produce modernity, finally leading him to the realization of his double position of an “internal colonizer” just as much as a “peripheral” colonized subject. It provides a productive framework through which to read the aporias of the avant-garde in relation to questions of the aesthetic dimension of biopolitics, nation-building, and the teleological modern historicism.

In each of the four chapters, the idea of *movement* is transformed by the experience of film, dislocating what it means to *see*. Such dislocation brings to the surface political questions related to the temporality of perception, the role of the body and of affect, and the place of the “peripheral” cosmopolitan avant-garde. The

chapters can be read as a sort of montage of theoretical speculations that work as an intervention in both the historical image of the peripheral avant-gardes, usually seen in positive and unproblematic lights, and also in film theory debates. What it does *not* want to claim is that an “indigenous” theory from the periphery is ontologically different from the theory of the metropole, or, to that matter, the “same.” Instead, the point is quite the opposite: it understands theory as a relation. All theory illuminates political relations of power, even when it wants to repress them. By taking up the comparative apparatus of film, the dissertation hopes to show the limits of the comparative regime of modernity, in order to contribute to the critique of the metaphysics of cultural difference that animates the geopolitics of film history—and of cultural history as a whole—and propose a different political understanding of embodied modes of engagement.

## CHAPTER 1: THE FUTURE OF A MEDIUM: TWO PROPOSITIONS

“Thus each day film further defines its means of expression. An eye that lowers before another, a hand that twitches, a smile beneath a mourning veil that one experiences, a pair of shoes that instead of merely removed from one’s way are thrown far with a thrust of the foot, a criminal that soaks the finger in milk to feed a kitty, the spark of a light bulb in a lamp that brings one’s thought to the desired jewel... and film each day acquires means to speak to the spirit through the eyes.” (Faria, “Eu acredito na imagem” 2)

“The human face, no matter how unsightly the face may be, is such that, when one stares intently at it, one feels that somehow, somewhere, it conceals a kind of sacred, exalted, eternal beauty. When I gaze on faces in “enlargement” within moving pictures, I feel this quite profoundly. Every aspect of the person’s face and body, aspects that would ordinarily be overlooked, is perceived so keenly and urgently that it exerts a fascination difficult to put into words.” (Tanizaki, “Mr. Aozuka’s Story” 236)

### *Universals; apparatuses*

The dream of a universal spectator, a predominant discourse used to validate cinema in its early narrative years, gave fuel to an image of the medium as the first platform in which language would not be a barrier for universal understanding. The (filmic) visual would be understood as the opposite of the verbal, just as the drive to realism, which justified synchronized sound, would be opposite to the drive for communication, which required the absence of dialogue. Of course, needless to say, the Griffithian dream of the universal medium—the overcoming of the Babel tower

through film—was embedded in the structures of imperialism and capitalism, privileging the paradigm of the so-called “Western” as the universalizable spectator.<sup>4</sup>

However, in the sites of encounter—the movie theaters—these images gave new visibility to a politics of perception, which revealed the vicissitudes of difference in the dream of the universal. Geopolitical mapping, capitalist infrastructures, and embodied experience met in the differences inhabited by the filmic spectator in and within the global epistemic “periphery,” be it the “tropics” or the “Orient.” The filmic experience entailed transformations in the perceptual engagement of the body with the world, carrying multiple political implications on conceptualizations of vision and body, the relation between image and time, and the location of different bodies—on and off-screen—in the geopolitical historical structure of modernity.

In this chapter, I will explore how different theorizations of filmic vision negotiated the complex of *not-being* “Western” in the speculations and desires for the future of film, which catalyzed important question of the politics of time and of perception around the moving image. I will focus on moments in which film was theorized as an unfinished medium in Brazil and Japan, both places where, in the early twentieth century, an international division of (visual) labor was very marked: those who were *spectators* to a foreign modernity on the screen (local consumers of images), and those who *were seen* by those who needed to learn how to be modern (global producers of images). The awareness of being “outside”, in the words of Brazilian film theorist and writer Octávio de Faria, “with the impassivity of the always belated spectators,” brings “non-Western-ness” into the frame as a particular relation

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<sup>4</sup> See Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 1991.



with history that is reiterated in the way that the medium is theorized as something yet to happen. (Faria, “I believe in the image” 3)<sup>5</sup> The desire for a universal mode of being, of showing, and of seeing gained strength with the apparatus of film.

The notion of apparatus is useful to think the implications of the different understandings of filmic perception proposed by the texts addressed here. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben suggests that, in Michel Foucault’s post-structuralist rejection of “universals”—State, Law, Sovereignty, and so on—what takes the place of the universal is the concept of “apparatus” (*dispositif*), understood as

not simply this or that police measure, this or that technology of power, and not even the generality obtained by their abstraction. Instead, as he claims in the interview from 1977, an apparatus is "the network [*le reseau*] that can be established between these elements. (Agamben 7)

An apparatus, being a network, is difficult to grasp in one single theoretical proposition. In the Foucauldian hypothesis, argues Agamben, it is from the relation and “relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses” that subjects are produced. (14) If we take the network analogy to its limit, each point in time and space of an apparatus—*dispositif*—will reveal a different constitution of relations—a “constellation,” to use a Benjaminian terminology—that will produce its subjects from particularly localized relations. As a *dispositif*, the apparatus is a technology of *production*, a set of subjectifying power technologies that build relations that are only

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<sup>5</sup> All of Faria’s quotes are my translations from Portuguese.

universalizable in the fact that they are all contingent upon the place and time one occupies.

In film theory, the concept of apparatus comes from the Althusserian lineage—instead of *dispositif*, *appareil* in French—through Jean-Louis Baudry’s definition of film as an apparatus for the reproduction of ideology.<sup>6</sup> Baudry’s “apparatus theory” pays attention to the optical constitution of classical narrative cinema—centralized artificial perspective, framing, camera movement, continuity montage—and material situation of its spectatorship—dark room, screen projection—to address classical cinema as a machine of abstraction of ideological surplus through the production of transcendental subjects around whom the filmic world is centered, whose “eye which moves is no longer fettered by a body, by the laws of matter and time, if there are no more assignable limits to its displacement” (Baudry 43). The desire for the universal, within the ideological-phenomenological apparatus, is fulfilled by the production of a disembodied transcendental spectator reduced to an eye: “the world will not only be constituted by this eye but for it” (Baudry 43). As an *appareil*, the apparatus is a machine of *abstraction*, understood as universalizing technology that responds to the ideological constitution of a mass individuality, carried out by film and its effects.

Cinema is an apparatus, both as a *dispositif* and as an *appareil*: it is a network of localized practices and discourses, and a technology of power; it is a material situation, and a cluster of desires; it is particularizing and universalizing. Any theory of the image—here, the filmic image—will *necessarily* imply its insertion in the two

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<sup>6</sup> See Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” 1974-1975.

circuits—of production and of abstraction—built upon a definition or tacit assumption of what *perception* is; that is, the relation between apparatus, image, and body. It is with this intercrossing that this chapter is concerned. In these “peripheral” theorizations on film, the geopolitics of modern historicism—the teleological discourse of belatedness—becomes intertwined with a politics of perception through its “anthropological dimension”: the relation between the spectator’s body and the bodies on screen. This is what I call a “geopolitics of perception.”

Reading Octávio de Faria’s film theory from the pages of the short-lived Brazilian journal *O Fan* in the late 1920’s, and the theoretical imaginations on the medium by Japanese novelist and screenwriter Tanizaki Jun’ichiro from the late 1910s to the 1920s, I will examine this “geopolitics of perception,” which brings together aesthetics, politics, and historicity in a discourse on visual mediation, alongside the “anthropological” questions it raised. What does *seeing* entail? What is its temporality? What sort of futurity does the image carry? What does it bring to the peripheral modernist elite, white and non-white? In both cases, image, mediation, and apparatus are theorized and negotiated always in relation to the question of the (im)possibility of a universal perceptual experience. Their thought about filmic perception reveals the anxieties with the discourse of being “outside” Western modernity, while the theoretical strategies deployed to circumvent such anxieties reveal the aporias and pitfalls of such modern Eurocentric discourse. In both cases, what emerges are cleavages of race, gender, and class, that get hidden under the dichotomy of West-Rest. Understanding the imbrication of aesthetic and political discourses revolving around film, this chapter addresses these questions as they

become intertwined with one another, dislocating the metaphysics of cultural-national difference.

*The Eye and the No-body: displacing Soviet theory*

In 1920's Brazil, movie-going was already an important element of the modern ethos that the big cities liked to showcase. Alongside urban reforms, mass media, and increasing industrialization, film was a technology that could carry several layers of meaning and value at once—entertainment, cultural capital, commodity, technological advancement—which fit well the paradoxical position that modernity itself occupied in common Brazilian imaginary, not unlike other non-Western spaces. As Rielle Navitski points out, since the early years of the twentieth century, “in Brazil’s expanding cities, the overwhelming and enervating qualities of a highly industrialized metropolis were as much an object of longing as an element of daily experience” (128). The apparatus of film was a repository of these contradictory and super-imposed temporalities: through its eloquent verisimilitude and technological realism, it projected the desired future as an already-present on the screen images. With moving images coming from mostly France and the United States, alongside the always contentious issue of the shaping and viability of “national cinema,” film was new enough to be an open-ended technology that summed to the senses not only what modernity *was* but, most importantly, what it *could be*.

Although a few modernist intellectuals, such as Mário de Andrade,<sup>7</sup> were familiar with some writings of European film theory and had cinema as a model for a

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion of Mário de Andrade, see chapter four.

modern type of perception, one of the first focused endeavors to theorize film in Brazil was carried out in the pages of the journal *O Fan*, which was written and published by the Rio de Janeiro film club called *Chaplin Club*, initially comprised by four members (Octávio de Faria, Plínio Sussekund Rocha, Claudio Mello, Almir Castro). The group's activities included the screening of films from the European avant-gardes; reading, debating, and producing film theory from a Brazilian perspective; and to think the role of criticism in the shaping of the future of film. As a politically conservative group of young elite intellectuals, they were nonetheless responsible for the first translations into Portuguese of Soviet montage theory, creating a discourse that set out to theorize the specificity of film—both as a narrative form and a technology—in the particular context of early twentieth-century modernizing Brazil.

Long forgotten in the history of film and aesthetic theory, Octávio de Faria's theoretical writings on the pages of *O Fan* are major endeavors of a film theory produced in Brazil, set up in dialogue with—and in difference from—theories coming from France, mainly, and Russia. A prolific intellectual, who wrote sociological treatises and novels, Faria figures among the first to see in film a serious object of theoretical, aesthetic, and political inquiry. His intensely argued theoretical thought modulates the relation between *image* and *time* through a territorialized spectatorship—seeing from the distance of Brazil—, negotiating tensions and paradoxes in the way that the filmic technology is conceptualized and theorized by him as a desired medium to come.

Cinema represents a fascination and a problem repeatedly revisited by Octávio de Faria. In his texts, what is pressingly at stake is the shaping of the future of the

medium, which was not only contingent upon the shaping of the future of the world, but determinant to it.<sup>8</sup> Through a medium that seemed to still be “unfinished,” Faria—with his peers in *O Fan*—is concerned with the ongoing process of North-Americanization of film, and, more importantly, with the advent of the talkies and what seemed to be a path away from pure filmic visuality. In the cusp of one of the biggest technological shifts in film history—the possibility of synchronized sound and dialogue, first with the sound-on-disc Vitaphone system, and later with sound-on-film—the future of film, and of the world itself, was at stake, just as much as out of reach for someone writing from Brazil.

Faria’s writings on film unfold in different layers as his thought advances from the first edition of *O Fan*, in August 1928, until the publication reaches its end, in December 1930. What is kept throughout is the centrality of the filmic image—to which Faria refers as only “the image”—to the fate of modernity, defined by him as the “period in which a whole conception of life has changed, allowing for a mere scientific discovery to rise to the category of art” (“I Believe in the Image” 3). As still a relatively new medium under construction, Faria sees film pertaining to both the spheres of art and of science—characterized by him through the difference between

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<sup>8</sup> The historical importance given to cinema was a common feature in many intellectuals of this period. For example, famously thinkers of the Frankfurt School, mainly Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno, would understand film as a major turning point in modernity, as was the case with intellectuals of the New Perception School (*Shinkankaku-ha*) in Japan, which will be discussed in chapter two. Here, my interest is to see how, or if, the same issues are read differently by those who were seen as not-fully modern, and what critique of modernity that allows for.

expression and realism—carrying the possibility of changing the concepts of life, perception, and time. He argues that

the basic fact to be considered is the cinema understood as a new medium, which was given to man by a scientific discovery. Just as the word. But much superior to it. A medium of expression more perfect, capable of better translating the complexities of thought and senses. A new language, richer, stronger, and universal. (“Rhythm” 3)

Faria’s theoretical debate on the present and future of film focuses on two main set of issues: the possibility of a *universal* experience; and the need to find alternatives to the codification that came from the central powers of the United States and Europe. The negotiation between two somewhat contradictory issues could only be solved by a non-dialectical ontology of the image, whose immateriality would dissolve the disputes that its mobility, globality, and indexicality might spur, circumventing the paradoxes that the universal entails. A theory of film seen from the periphery would have to think the universal through different lenses from the ones used by the center. If, for Faria, Charles Chaplin represented the “present” of the medium in its fulfillment—although one still to be universalized since, as Faria writes, “cinema, except for the work of Chaplin, has produced nothing or close to nothing” (“I Believe in the Image” 3)—Soviet cinema offered a possible future of Brazilian cinema.

Film as a “horizon of expectation,” as Sarah Ann Wells describes it (153), could not escape its material location within the circuits of political and epistemological power, capital accumulation, and access to technology. All of which a peripheral space such as Brazil did not fully enjoy—perhaps, indeed, only as a

“horizon of expectation.” Soviet cinema and montage theory, thus, are received by Faria and the cosmopolitan critics of *O Fan* as the best model to follow. The need to find new models of expression that escaped those developed in Hollywood and Western Europe led to the encounter with Soviet theory as a promising revelation of what Wells calls a “parallel modernity”—since the access to foreign film culture relied on a distribution mediated by the hegemonic markets, the production of other places such as Japan was still very limited for Brazilian audiences. In Wells’ words:

In this [Latin American] context, Soviet cinema offered a unique point of inflection. As the only foreign film industry not part of Western Europe or the US that circulated in Latin America during the modernist period, it represented an important possibility for an alternative cinematic modernity. (154)

Unlike the 1970s Third Cinema and Cinema Novo’s reception of Soviet theory and film’s revolutionary ideals, in the 1920s and early 1930s the absence of the films themselves invested Soviet film with an aura of promise and speculation, through the mediation of the pages of European publications. It was seen, foremost, as Wells argues, as “a *tactic* to construct a virtual cosmopolitan film spectatorship that did not preclude a preoccupation with the national, even when—or perhaps precisely when—Soviet films themselves were not available” (154).

It is interesting to realize that the Soviet thought on film and montage enters Brazil through the high-theoretical endeavor of the conservative Octávio de Faria. Besides introducing the cinema from Russia, then absent in Brazil, as a novelty that opened an alternative path for film, the journal *O Fan* also published the first



translations of texts by Vsevolod Pudovkin and Sergei Eisenstein, commented on montage theory, and organized screenings of a few Soviet films in their monthly events. Faria, as their leading enthusiast, was adamant in pointing at the importance of the Soviet thought and practice for the future of the medium particularly in Brazil, almost as an evidence of not only the importance of film for the future, but also as a sign of hope for a peripheral nation to participate in the shaping of the medium.

Faria opens his essay “Russian Cinema and Brazilian Cinema” (“Cinema Russo e Cinema Brasileiro,” hereafter “RCBC”) with a reference to Lenin, in a quote he got from French film historian Léon Moussinac’s *Le cinéma soviétique* (1928). The famous quote, in which Lenin states that “filmic art is the most important art for Russia,” functions in Faria’s text as an evidence of the importance of film, although turned upside down. If Lenin saw film’s importance for its capacity of massification of revolutionary ideals, Faria makes it clear that, for him, what is at stake is *not* politics, but rather the medium and the art of film: “I do not even want to say that I am not a communist. That would exceed the limits of these columns, which are not concerned neither with politics, nor with sociology” (“RCBC” 1). Faria wants to purify Soviet film from its communism, stating that “we shall refrain from a deeper judgment, which necessarily means to discuss communism itself,” in order to retain only what he sees as the aesthetic potency of the medium. (“RCBC” 3)

The first appearance of Soviet film theory in Brazil comes “purified” from its revolutionary politics. Such a purification depends precisely on the place of the spectator—the Brazilian spectator looking at the development of the medium from outside. Instead of following conservative critics of Soviet film for its propaganda

uses, Faria suggests that the condition of being a peripheral and distant nation would give Brazil an epistemological authority:

No other thing does the American cinema than propagate *its* ideas. A whole sociology, and opposite to the communist. To the eyes of Moscow, then, it is New York who is the rampant propagandist. And since I am neither Moscow, nor New York... (“CRCB,” 3)

Being distant, the periphery would occupy the position of the spectator, “outside” of the main stage of history. From such an epistemic vantage point, Faria is able to make a statement that *all* is political in film—Hollywood and Soviets—except for himself, as the Brazilian subject who sees from outside.

Through such a detached look, the medium of film could be also detached from its environment, purified from its political use. Soviet montage thus, in Faria’s reading, is not a tool for aesthetic-political sensorial stirring of the masses, but rather it is an artistic instrument to the animation of the inanimate. The political is obliterated in favor of an idea of the “vital.” Explaining Pudovkin’s montage theory—through his reading of the French translation of “Montage, vital element in cinematography” (“Le montage, élément vital en cinégraphie”), in the pages of the January 1929 issue of the journal *Cinéa-Ciné Pour Tous*<sup>9</sup>—he distinguishes it from both US-American continuity and French rhythmic editing:

The construction of the film, in his [Pudovkin’s] opinion, is exhausted neither by “the chronological succession inherent to the scenes” (which is the

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<sup>9</sup> French film journal, published from 1923 to 1932.

American continuity), neither by the creation of a rhythm. He says that “montage” is the basic driving force through which soulless photographs (the separate “bouts” or “plans”) turn into a living cinegraphic life. (“RCBC” 4)

The temporality of the medium becomes intertwined with its visual “vitality”: the political is suppressed under a general idea of life. Faria claims that montage instills *life* onto the *dead* photographic instants, operating the “transposition of one reality into another reality” (“RCBC” 4). Emphasizing that “the Russian realized all this... Pudovkin. Eisenstein,” (“RCBC” 4), Faria and his peers in *O Fan* would see Soviet theory as path to the human universality of life, of a localized access to a universal humanity.

Faria’s major work on political thought, the book *The Fate of Socialism (O Destino do Socialismo)*, published in 1933, just a few years after the last issue of *O Fan*, provides a frame through which to read his vitalist take on Soviet theory. The book, described by Faria himself as an “act of anti-socialist faith” (XVII), exposes his adamant rejection of socialism in favor of an emphatic defense of a transcendental human universality, premised upon a temporality that does not admit change, that is, which denies any possible difference between present and future.

Affirming that “man is one and only in all times”, he criticizes Marxist thought for its dislocation from “man” to “material relations,” which are historically, spatially, and physically determined (*The Fate of Socialism* 12). Since he argues that “to start from man means to truly know man and not to isolate him in a specific historical moment, in a given society” (12–13), socialism for Faria would mean “the revolt against human nature, against man as he is in the name of a man as he could be” (18).

Faria's concern with a transcendental notion of *life* that would replace politics is premised on a "humanity" devoid of history and place—and, as we shall see, of body—revealing the desire for a universal that would privilege the vantage point of an elite comprised of "spectators" from the margins of capitalist modernity.<sup>10</sup>

### *Visual Labor and Absolute Value*

Faria replaces politics with life in order to gain access to a universal sameness—but what how does he link it with the filmic experience? The essay titled "I believe in the image" ("Eu creio na imagem"), published in September 1929, proposes a media-historical narrative that tells the rise of the image and the crisis of the word as part of the "spirit of general collapse of the whole Europe in this end of century" (3). In a text that lies somewhere between a film-phenomenological essay and a manifesto against the talkies, Faria argues that the inclusion of the spoken word into film would pull the medium towards the wrong direction, one that would go against the historical possibilities introduced by it in the field of perception. He places himself, and the Brazilian readers, as external spectators of a geopolitical and historical shift taking place in the modern world, i.e. Europe, in which media and ethics would be inextricably intertwined: "The apotheosis of the image which we are

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<sup>10</sup> It is possible to think Faria's "life" here through the similarity it shows to Husserlian transcendental phenomenology and the idea of *Lebenswelt*. Such a close comparative task exceeds the scope of the present dissertation, but the critical argument developed here can/should be read as a critical modulation to the Eurocentric project of transcendental phenomenology *and* to the politics of "peripheral" modernism. See Edmund Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: an Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, 1970 [1936].

watching here, from Brazil, in our impassivity of always late spectators, is the result of the failure of the word, which seems evident to me” (“I Believe in the Image” 3).

Faria seems to suggest that the “always late” Brazilian spectators, although not qualified to intervene in the course of history, would be ideal judges of such an “apotheosis of the image.” In an idiosyncratic argumentative move, and somehow anticipating thinkers such as Vilém Flusser and Bernard Stiegler’s media-based histories, Faria evokes Henri Bergson in dialogue with Nietzsche to propose a diagnosis of a general crisis of Western Europe. In the rise of the visual media of film, he reads a general crisis of human reason represented by the decline of the “word”:

Bergson goes deeper, from man to the words themselves and finds out the reason for such an insufficiency [of the word]. He thus moves from subjective to objective misrepresentation, if we can so say. [...] It was thus the two greatest philosophers of recent times who destroyed the preconceptions related to the excellence of the word, preparing the ground for the affirmation of the image. (Faria, “I Believe in the Image” 3)

The collapse of the medium of the word, he argues, would imply the prominence of not any type of image, but the filmic one. He sees an evidence of such a crisis in the uptake of filmic techniques in modernist literature

in the style of Proust, Bernanos, and Julian Green—who seek to convey the highest number of directions on each momentary state of spirit of their heroes, thus enriching all reconstructions of the mental processes that they study, true uninterrupted series of close-ups of thoughts... (Faria, “I Believe in the Image” 3)

Through his reading of Bergson's idea of movement and duration (*durée*), Faria places the word in the realm of rationality and intelligence, translated in temporal terms as the interruption embodied by the instant. In this sense, the word's "domain is the inanimate, the discontinuous—in opposition to the instinct, this faculty of reaching life in its continuity, its non-decomposability by the process of reasoning" ("I believe in the Image" 3). Faria's version of vitalism—which substitutes "politics" with "life" in his reading of Soviet montage theory—draws from Bergson to conceptualize the word as a rational interruption of the phenomenological wholeness of life, "cutting its continuity and rounding up certain edges" (3).

What is equally important for the theorist is that the difference between the universality of the image and the insufficiency of the verbal is not merely a semiotic or cultural one—to which the Griffithian utopia of a post-babel filmic world would attend. It is understood, instead, as a *temporal* one: the universality of the image would reside in its relation to a temporal totality of the "whole life," which would be represented by the filmic ability to display time beyond the instant, movement *without* change.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the instant as the opposite of such an empty and dead concept, the most important reference would be Walter Benjamin, who would take a monadological approach to the historical conundrum that the photographic instant—*Augenblick*—could bring. This represents yet a different understanding of vitalism, which politicizes life through the interplay of materialism and aesthetics, different from Faria's universalist humanist theorization. See Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 1942; and Ariella Azoulay's "The Tradition of the Oppressed," 2007.

To build a total image of the universal, Faria rereads Bergson's idea of life as opposed to the idea of form. He argues that "The word is only good to designate 'forms.' And, according to Bergson: "the form is but an instant that is extracted from a transition." Therefore, as we have seen, it is necessarily incomplete, false" ("I Believe in the Image" 3). The word, for Faria, would function in a photographic process of analysis that interrupts the flux of time. Film would provide back the synthesis, a process he believes to be shared by human perception: "Well, since what we always do is "to catch vistas almost instantaneous of the reality that passes" and, later, to reconstruct them in our brain, Bergson arrived at the following proposition: "The mechanism of our usual knowledge is of a cinematographic nature."" ("I Believe in the Image" 3)

For Faria, the ideal of a pure formless medium would only possibly be translated to the screen as the single-shot film. This idea is introduced in one of Faria's first film-theory texts, "The Scenario and The Future of Film" ("O Scenario e o Futuro do Cinema," 1928), and tested in his screenplay "Reincidência," published on the pages of *O Fan*. Faria goes against both rhythmic montage and classical narrative editing, defending that the true filmic requires an absolute "value of visualization:" a total continuity that would eliminate all cuts. The future that Faria desires for film tends to a minimum of interruptions in its flow, reaching an absolute visuality that he believes to be only available to film: "there will be no more literary or psychological value. Only a new value, of visualization." ("The Scenario and the Future of Cinema" n.2, 3) He thus exemplifies:

When I watch a movie of nine acts, deemed exceptional, such as *The Crowd*<sup>12</sup> and, for it, I need to accommodate my sight as much as over 1,100 times—twelve times per second, more or less—having in mind that, beyond the film’s two hundred something title cards, over nine hundred images [shots] passed on the screen, it is then that the theory of absolute continuity imposes itself. And it covers the form—ideal, for sure—of a movie, one-piece, that is, with absolute visual continuity (“The Scenario and the Future of Cinema” n.1, 2).

Such an “absolute visual continuity” implies a relation between *seeing* and *labor* [*trabalho*] that would shape such “absolute value of visualization,” which requires the maximum reduction of “the constant labor of accommodating the sight to each new scene, the adjustment of the mind to the prism through which one needs to see” (“The Scenario” n.1, 2). The cut, he argues, would not only interrupt the vital flow of life, but it would also physically and mentally *tire*. Faria affirms that to see across cuts makes filmic spectatorship become *visual labor*, a labor that is both physical—of the eye—and mental—of the memory: the spectator’s eye needs to readjust to every new shot, in a regime of attention that requires concentration but that also constantly reminds the viewer “that that is a celluloid film, cut, glued, split, etc.” (“The Scenario” n.1, 2).

The absolute continuity fantasized by Faria—expressive of the universality of the vital flow that cannot be split into words, or photograms—would require that one does not engage in any physical relation with the apparatus. Or, in other words, would require the apparatus to vanish. If, as Hans Belting reminds us, “the distinction

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<sup>12</sup> *The Crowd*, (1928) a US film directed by King Vidor, was widely watched in Brazil and highly praised in the pages of *O Fan* as an example against the talkies.



between image and medium is rooted in the self-experience of our body,” where memory-images are also produced, (11) in order to achieve Faria’s absolute “value of visualization” in which visual labor must be avoided, it would be necessary to eliminate the difference between image and medium and, hence, suppress the body. In this way, time could be experienced as an unchanging present by a *universal no-body*.

The critique of the word, which made his theory one of the most ardent anti-talkie discourses among his peers, stemmed from two factors: the inclusion of dialogues would mean the interruption of the moving flow of the image by words, and also it would cause the intrusion of the aural into the visual absorption of the spectator. He explains: “The image is a gesture that gets animated, that starts, that acquires life. The word (word, sound, etc) is a gesture (if one can say so) that has ended, been sterilized, that has died” (“I Believe in the Image” 3). The future of the apparatus would lie, therefore, in film’s ontological destiny of producing spectators bound by the universal temporality of life, who are addressed *not* in their bodies. The future of film’s universality would thus depend on the production of a disembodied purely visual spectator, in an immaterial medium. Any interruption, any address to other senses, in his theory, becomes “a parasite to life” (“I Believe in the Image” 3). Although it might look as if Faria tries to overcome the mind-body dualism through vitalism, his fantasy of filmic viscosity serves to further intensify the split, which is doubled in a body-eye dualism.

It is worth here taking a detour to look into Henri Bergson’s own philosophy of life, to help understand Faria’s stakes in his film-vitalism. Contrary to Faria’s understanding, Bergson adamantly rejected filmic technology as capable of capturing

movement and duration (*durée*). As is known, Bergson's philosophical project was to build a non-metaphysical ontology of time against the scientific claim of objectivity, described by a dialectical relation between body and mind (spirit) in the temporal category of duration (*durée*). To build a philosophy of life based on the ontology of becoming—that is, of change, instead of being—Bergson draws a distinction between what human intelligence represents in order to enable action in the world—measurable time— and the domain of the actual phenomena of life, which unfolds as a becoming in a temporal duration (*durée*) that is not representable since it is not divisible.

For the French philosopher, any ontological project requires the understanding the experiential nature of the *durée*, which human intelligence can access only retrospectively, already at a loss, through the act of *seeing* the phenomena of *movement* and of *change* once the experience has already ceased to exist.<sup>13</sup> The “intellectual representation of movement,” Bergson describes, is “an excerpt fixed, dissected, emptied, a general system of abstract ideas” (*La Pensée et le Mouvant*, 15).<sup>14</sup> Human intelligence, he claims, only deals with immobilities, never achieving movement as it is experienced, which is what Faria transposes to his own theory. Such ungraspability, however, for Bergson, would be related to time's non-repeatability, which would prove life to be open-ended, non-causal, and always based on the emerging of the new.<sup>15</sup> It is, ultimately, an ontology of history that is built upon the

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<sup>13</sup> See Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, 1962, chapter 1; and *La Pensée et le Mouvant*, 1934, p.12.

<sup>14</sup> All translations of Bergson's “La Pensée et le Mouvant” from French are my own.

<sup>15</sup> On the role of contingency and the ontology of the new in Bergson, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*, 2011.

experience of change in matter, in which the future is not foreseeable from the present, and the past is open to whatever present it is narrated from. Bergson inescapable difference arrives at an opposite proposition than that of Faria's inescapable sameness, since for the French philosopher the nature of duration would produce a history in which "neither its course, nor its direction, and consequently none of its terms are given" (Bergson, *La Pensée et le Mouvant*, 24).

Faria states that "from that [Bergson's thought] one can easily reach the conclusion that interests me (I do not know if Bergson wrote it) but which is evident: that, if "our usual knowledge is of a cinematographic nature," film is the best means to reproduce such a knowledge" ("I Believe in the Image" 3). But Bergson did not write it. The filmic apparatus, for the French philosopher, worked as an analogy of the artificial process of intelligence, which necessarily stays outside the "inner becoming of things" (Bergson, *Creative Evolution* 332). Film, for Bergson, would be a deceiving apparatus that masked its materiality, its fundamental temporal interruption. Film's process of mechanical synthesis of movement from single still photographic units would thus show reason's limited grasp of time, as he explains:

If movement is made of a series of positions, and change [is made of] a series of states, time is made of distinct and juxtaposed parts. No doubt we still say that they succeed each other, but such a succession is then similar to the images of a cinematographic film: the film can unwind ten times, a hundred times, a thousand times faster, without anything being modified in that which unwinds; if it goes infinitely fast (now outside of the apparatus), if the unwinding becomes instantaneous, those will still be the same images. [...] In

sum, time thus envisioned is but an ideal space, where we suppose that all past, present and events are aligned... ” (Bergson, *La Pensée et le Mouvant* 16)

Instead of the “continuous creation, uninterrupted gushing of novelty” (Bergson *La Pensée* 16) that the experience of *durée* provides through movement *in* the body, filmic capacity of repetition without change was for Bergson an evidence of its *incapacity* to harbor movement. That is why, not without a hint of provocation, he states that, if there is movement in film, it would *not* be on the images projected on the screen. Instead, it would be hidden somewhere “inside the apparatus (*appareil*)” (*La Pensée* 14) As science and technology historian Jimena Canales reads it, Bergson’s notion of movement—as an actualization of duration—is of an experience “inescapably entangled with the rest of reality” (“Movement Before Cinematography,” 290). His version of vitalism would differ from Faria’s because it entails an entanglement between life and body through the inescapable duration—*durée*—of time. Movement is experienced by the duration of/in the body. Therefore, instead of looking at the *images* on the screen, Bergson turns to the *body* of the machine, as the only alternative to the *experience* of change lived by the body of living beings.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> As Canales describes, the whole debate on the transition from photography to film revolved around the place of the observer. (Canales 2009, 124-125) The question was whether a photographic machine could be more reliable for the portrayal and the study of natural phenomena than the human observer. And—just like Bergson, Faria, and many others would affirm—since living phenomena necessarily entail *change*, the capture of *movement* over duration was seen as the next step to the observation of the real. The freezing effect of photography, it was soon noticed, would fall short of any accurate observation of the world.<sup>16</sup>

The mere shift from apparatus (both as *dispositif* and as *appareil*) to image, in Faria's theory of film, entails the obliteration of the observer's body in the process of perception. Faria's theory suppresses mediation in perception, and change in duration, focusing on the *eye* and the purely visual aimed at purifying and repressing the *locality* of perception within the limits of the body. If, as Jonathan Crary argues, modern technologically mediated visual perception was marked by the emergence of "the body as a productive physiological apparatus," when Faria eliminates the body in favor of a concept of transcendental life, he imagines an *image without perception* ("Vision and Visuality" 46). The erasure of politics from Soviet revolutionary montage theory, justified by him through the place of the Brazilian subject as a "spectator" (instead of a participant) of history, can be understood through the erasure of the body from filmic vision in his conflation of image and medium, which allows for a conservative temporality that excludes change. Instead of the interruptive revolutionary politics of montage, the "absolute visual continuity" would thus be an absolute present in which no other world could be imagined.

When Faria imagines the future of film based on Bergson but shifts the philosophers' focus from the materiality of the apparatus to the image on screen, he tears apart the body from the eye, inadvertently revealing its opposite: the *impossibility* of an embodied universality that escapes political change. It desires *life* without relationality, through the localized universality of a Soviet theory striped from its politicality. For the peripheral modernist elite intellectual, the filmic promise of universality is that which detaches one from one's own bodily and political conditions, "something that makes the spectator forget her own personality and the place where he

is.” (“I Believe in the Image” 6) The “intellectual cinema,” proposed by Faria and defended by Aluizio Bezerra Coutinho in *O Fan*, n.7, with “each sequence, each image, perfectly autonomous,” was not a matter of word against image, but rather a matter of image versus apparatus, of permanence against interruption. (“Em Demanda do Cinema Intellectual” jan 1930, p.2)

### *Filmic Crystallization*

Some ten years prior to Faria’s text on the image, another speculative essay about the future of film was written in another so-called “peripheral” space engaged in the project of modernization. In September 1917, the modernist writer, essayist, and (for a short period) screenwriter Tanizaki Jun’ichirō penned the manifesto essay “The Present and Future of Moving Pictures” (*Katsudō shashin no genzai to shōrai*), which was first published in the journal *Shinshōsetsu* (The New Novel). Tanizaki was among the strongest enthusiasts of film in Japan in the early decades of the twentieth century, being one of the first to address the relation between cinema, modernity, and perception—the core problem that occupied Faria, which Thomas Lamarre calls the problem of the “cinematization of the world”—starting in the late 1910’s, before he was hired to work for two years in the short-lived Taikatsu Studios, until eventually leaving film criticism and production. His thought on film continues, from the mid-1920’s on, incorporated in his literary fiction writing.

With a growing film production and enjoying rapid capital accumulation, especially during the period of the first world war in Europe, Japan also had a growing intellectual community theorizing film—something that would grow enormously

towards the end of the Taishō (1912–1926) and early Showa (1926–1989) eras. In this sense, Tanizaki was writing in an environment where film was a growing object of thought, which was a different context from Brazil—related to the different ways industrial capitalism got established in these two places.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, as a cultural and epistemic object, also in Japan film embodied the desired ideal of “Western” modernity.

As a modernist, Tanizaki was critical of the transposition of Japanese theatrical codes to film, such as the use female impersonators (*onnagata*), static camera, and the deployment of the live narration of *benshi* or *katsuben*, in favor of a naturalist mode of representation that he considered more suitable for the filmic medium. In his 1917 essay on the future of film, such claims, addressed to Japanese filmmakers, place Tanizaki within the modernizing discourse that was called the Pure Film Movement (*Jun'eigageki Undō*), which Isolde Standish describes as an ““intellectual approach to filmmaking” (34). Pure Film was a rather loose “movement,” characterized by a general discourse in journals and magazines calling for the “modernization” of Japanese film in the paradigms of classical narrative cinema.

As Aaron Gerow argues, in the late 1910's and early 1920's Japan, the Pure Film Movement aimed at constructing the modern object called “cinema” (*eiga*), as opposed to the un-filmic idea of “moving pictures” (*katsudō shashin*). In Gerow's words, such aesthetic modernization of film meant that:

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<sup>17</sup> Among other important thinkers that turned their attention to film were Marxist Tosaka Jun, Nakai Masakazu, Terada Torahiko, besides intellectuals that would become prominent Marxist film theorists such as Iwasaki Akira and Tanaka Jun'ichirō.

modes of cinematic narration were altered, *onnagata* (female impersonators) disappeared in favor of actresses, the star system was solidified, the institution of the author-director formed, the screenplay was established and codified, the genres of *shinpa* and *kyūgeki* were replaced by *gendaigeki* and *jidaigeki*.”  
(Gerow 18)

Scholars such as Irena Hayter and Aaron Gerow read the Pure Film agenda as a choice for a clean and bourgeois version of modernity over a popular one—of the new high-end district of Ginza in opposition to the popular Asakusa, where noisy movie theaters thrived in film’s early years. The codification of the classical narrative film, as seen in the movies coming from the growing presence of US-American films, produced a unified object that could be consumed anywhere by any spectator, without the costly and disturbingly embodied presence of the *benshi*.

Tanizaki’s interest in film is directly related to the medium he has seen coming from the “West”: “I would go as far as to say that Western films, no matter how short or trivial, are utterly fascinating in comparison with theater in Japan” (“The Present and Future of Moving Pictures” 65. Hereafter “The Present and Future”).<sup>18</sup> Just as much as Faria, the consciousness of being “outside” is central to Tanizaki’s fascination with film—but unlike his Brazilian peer, Tanizaki believes the potential of film has already been achieved in the historical present of Western modernity. The ideal of a “pure” medium localized the modern, at once, within the “Western” and the bourgeois spheres—which were seen as somewhat equivalent. In this sense, when the

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<sup>18</sup> Tanizaki’s quotations are the ones available in English language editions, unless otherwise noted, in the cases where I will offer my own translations.



Pure Film Movement called for the “purification” of film into an art form, it hygienized it from both its lower-class dimension of street attraction [*misemono*] and from its local Japanese traces, in favor of a sophisticated and universal aesthetic form.

Irena Hayter reads the Pure Film Movement, along with other modernist movements happening around the same time such as New Perception School (*Shinkankaku-ha*, which will be addressed in Chapter 2), as sorts of sensorial management programs that split the senses apart in order to subsume them into capitalist exchange. That is, film’s inherent realism also shaped politically what reality should look like, and which corporeal sense would be best equipped to assess it. As she argues:

As a discourse [...] it was a potent manifestation of the larger historical forces that further separated the senses and amplified certain single historical pathways. The senses were to be managed by different media and included in capitalist circulation and exchange. If cinema was becoming an intensely visual experience, then the telephone, the phonograph, and the radio, on the other hand, were working to detach hearing from seeing. (Hayter 296)

For Hayter, the push towards film modernization meant the defense of its path towards a detached visuality, making up a “disembodied, intensely absorbed spectatorship that focused on the visual,” similar to the ideal latent in Faria’s approach to a universal form of cinema. (Hayter 296) The question of distance and locality in the “periphery” of the “Western” centers was, naturally, always tinged with the desire for distinction of local elites.

Tanizaki's claim for the "future of moving pictures" is commonly read as an embrace of the modernization paradigm of the Pure Film Movement, based on the desire for the construction of a transparent medium modeled after "Western" film. If, as Tanizaki writes addressing filmmakers in Japan, "for the role of a beautiful woman, a beautiful actress must by all means play the part, and an old man must without fail fill the role of an old man (as it is for the most part in Western pictures)," it would be because phenomenal immediacy—the actual body playing the fictional character—was seen as a condition to achieve "Western" modernity (68). The fact of cultural difference and modernization are usually placed by critics and historians as central propellers to Tanizaki's approach to the filmic apparatus—first as a theorist, then as a screenwriter in the Taikatsu studios. Joanne Bernardi's study of his film writings, for example, thus describes it:

He had always exhibited a strong interest in foreign cultures, and around the time he entered the film industry his fascination with the West had become extreme. This obsession with Western culture played an important role in his becoming involved in motion pictures. (Bernardi 145)

In a similar fashion to Faria, the modernity and foreignness of film fascinated Tanizaki—a fascination that, nonetheless, moves his thought beyond the mere claim to naturalism. Tanizaki's interest in foreign films—much like modernists and avant-gardists elsewhere outside the US-Europe sphere—is usually placed by commentators and historians as the most fundamental background to his interest in film, in spite of *what* he theorized film *to be*. There seems to be a desire for Tanizaki's desire for the

West latent in scholarly works on his film writings. Less careless, Thomas Lamarre links the presence of film in Tanizaki to “the West as metaphysical effect”:

Tanizaki's interest in the West as metaphysical effect is one of the most interesting aspects of his work. And it leads him to two insights. First, the West is not an empirical object or site but a form of desire, a metaphysical effect that is only temporarily actualized in specific artefacts and commodities. Second, as a result, the West is mobile and indifferent to scale: its effects can be compressed or extended anywhere and everywhere. (Lamarre, “The deformation of the modern spectator” 35)

Indeed, Tanizaki’s call for a transparent and naturalist medium is explicitly inspired by his spectatorial experience with foreign film. Most Japanese intellectuals of the period patronized more foreign films than Japanese ones, usually either seen as “non-artistic” or too theatrical—backwards. But if the “West” appears as a “metaphysical effect,” in Lamarre’s words, it is nonetheless carried through specific objects—such as the female body, capitalist commodities, the coffee shops—of which *film* seems to be the ultimate representative, since the spatial distance separating the non-Western subject to its object of desire could be shortened by film’s perceptive transparency. At first, it would seem, in this shortening would lie the desired purity of the “Pure Film Movement.”

Although this explanation seems to fit perfectly to both the reading of Pure Film as a claim to transparency, and the reading of Tanizaki as a subscriber to the teleological modernization agenda, it is precisely what separates Tanizaki and Faria—the understanding of the rapport between apparatus, image, and body—that will reveal

not only the impossibility of purity but his theory of filmic mediation *as* a theory of impossibility, in which there is no metaphysics of East/West, primitive/modern difference, nor there is the Western form/Oriental content dichotomy. Instead, there are rather the different forms of virtualization of those into different objects-commodities, which do not get actualized. They ultimately vanish into light. It is all a matter of the centrality of perception.

Tanizaki, in his 1917 essay, writes that “Just as painting lacks sound and poetry lacks shape, so too because of their flaws, moving pictures are forms that effect “crystallization,” the purification of nature requisite to art” (“The Present and Future” 68). As an effect of the techniques of enlargement and the close-up, the fascination brought about by filmic purification depended on the fact that movie pictures “lack the sound and color of actual objects,” (68) which would elevate human perception beyond its naturalized conditions: “The human face, no matter how unsightly the face may be, is such that, when one stared intently at it, one feels that somehow, somewhere, it conceals a kind sacred, exalted, eternal beauty. When I gaze on faces in “enlargement” within moving pictures, I feel this quite profoundly.” (68)

In Tanizaki, filmic ontology resides in film’s capacity to extract the “actual objects” from the physical world in the process that Tanizaki calls “crystallization”: a purification of nature into timelessness, somewhat similar to Jean Epstein’s concept of *photogenie*, the achievement of an extra-historical aesthetic quality. Such a purification, a call for a “return to nature” (*shizen ni kaeru*), paradoxically, however, entails a constant interruption of the flow of the film by scale-deforming close-ups. Opposite to Faria, Tanizaki rejected the seamless continuity of the long take—a stance

that could be read as Tanizaki's privileging of space, through the magnified scale of the screen, over the temporal fluidity of the long take. In Tanizaki's future of film there is no possible "absolute continuity," to use Faria's term. In fact, the emphasis on the close-up and the visual distortions made possible by film places Tanizaki's ontology not only on the side of the fetish—the focus on the "larger than life" actors on screen—but, most importantly, on the *screen* itself. The medium's future, for him, was *not* on the value of duration or its access to the truth of life through movement, but rather on the transformation of life into images on the screen.

A filmic ontology that focuses on the extracted and augmented image is an ontology built on the filmic screen's scale and luminosity, instead of an ontology of the world. In this sense, it is an anti-ontology. The close-up as an object of thought, as Mary Ann Doane (2003) reminds us, usually entails thinking film *as* image and not as representation. As a "potential semiotic threat" that isolates an object from the dramatic logic of the *mise-en-scène*, the close-up points to "the screen as surface, with the annihilation of a sense of depth and its corresponding rules of perspectival realism. The image becomes, once more, an image rather than a threshold onto a world" ("The Close-up" 91). The close-up is the affirmation of the *image on the screen* and its mediating presence, rather than that of narrative knowledge and immersion. Through the combination of physical proximity—as in English, *close-up*—and the disturbance of scale—as in French *gros-plan*—Doane reads the close-up as a sign of the loss of control over space that is characteristic of modernity, a disturbance of the space-time continuum.

The manipulation of distance and scale was described by Tanizaki as film's most marked difference to theatre: "While the stage always entails a fixed distance between actors and spectators, film differs in that its actors at times loom within inches and at other times appear at a distance of several blocks" ("The Present and Future" 67). Unlike Faria's fascination with the temporality of the film, which would dissolve the body in a conflation of apparatus and image generating an "absolute value," Tanizaki's fascination relied precisely on the unsurmountable difference between image, spectator's body, and physical world. Filmic purifying power of "crystallization" consisted on the gap it could open between perception and physical world not as an evidence of the "falsification" of the image or of an escape from the body. It meant rather a direct address to the body that could provide a common ground to all embodied spectators through the screen's ability to work the "imagification" of the physical—a democratization of the process of abstraction—which is the opposite of Faria's Bergsonian dissolution of the body into a non-physical vitality. It suggests a common difference that creates a zone of tension between perception in the body, the image, and the screen.

#### *The Anthropological Screen and Image as Interruption*

In an article titled "Film and Lifestyle" ("Eiga to Seikatsuyōshiki"), published in the journal *Film Era (Eiga Jidai)*, in July 1926, the film critic Iwasaki Akira wrote, in regard to film in Japan:

the biggest problem with nowadays (*genzai*) Japanese cinema is the fact that it is cinema of Japanese people. Japanese people! With chubby trunks, short

necks, bowlegs, flat facial expressions; even if we ignore those, it is the Japanese, who lack fresh wit and the force of initiative! That is, [films] made by the Japanese, who, in any thinkable aspect, stand opposite to the concept of ‘filmic’ (*eigateki*)” (51).<sup>19</sup>

Claiming that the problem of Japanese film is that it reproduces (*mosha suru*) Japanese life, which is “totally devoid of a ‘filmic atmosphere’” (*eigateki fun’iki*), Iwasaki is saying that the problem is that the film reveals the very physicality of Japan itself, its bodies, spaces, and objects (Iwasaki 51). Part of a common discourse of the time,<sup>20</sup> he connects the Japanese body to the “un-modern” Japanese “material life” (*seikatsu*), from the clothes to the narrow streets, in what he saw as their incapacity to live up to the modern atmosphere required by the medium of film. His complaint represents well the racial complex that results from filmic modernity, which I call the “anthropological ambivalence” spurred by film.

The anthropological is, as Naoki Sakai (2010) argues, a particular and powerful feature of the modern intellectual discourse that places transcendental universal knowledge (theory) on one side of the modern “Western” subject—*humanitas*—opposite to the other sphere whose knowledge is “only” empirical, or in other words, localized, physical, restricted—*anthropos*. Sakai explains:

As the historical evolution of anthropology suggests, *humanitas* has signified those people who could engage in knowledge production in both the first and the second relationships namely, in the empirical as well as transcendental

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<sup>19</sup> Iwasaki Akira’s quote are my translations from Japanese.

<sup>20</sup> For another iteration of the self-deprecating racialized discourse, see chapter three, on Murayama Tomoyoshi.

relationships, hence, empirico-transcendental doublet while *anthropos* has gradually been reserved for people who participate in knowledge-production only in the first. Thus, humanity in the sense of *humanitas* has come to designate Western or European humanity, to be distinguished from the rest of humanity so long as we trust in and insist upon the putative unity of the West. This means that humanity in the sense of *humanitas* authorizes the very distinction of the West from what Stuart Hall incisively called ‘the Rest’.  
(Sakai 455)

The “ambivalence” to which I refer is precisely the blurring of these distinctions that happen in the process of subjectification of the peripheral elite as a constant tension: to occupy, at once, the place of the *humanitas* and of the *anthropos*, a position that Fatimah Tobing Rony (1996) calls the “third eye,” made possible first by the spectacle of film, and later by the post-colonial condition. Film functioned, in the early twentieth century, as the visual inscription of race, “bringing close” the anthropological divide. Deguchi Takehito reads a “complex of whiteness” constantly present in Tanizaki’s work and in film spectatorship in Japan during the Taishō and early Showa periods, strongly informed by the recent developments in racial relations between Japan and the United States, with the discourse of the yellow peril rising with the 1924 Immigration Act that prohibited Asian immigration to the North-American country.

To imagine the universal from the anthropologically ambivalent place of the elite in the margins of Western modernity, Faria has to imagine a no-body in front of a total image, a pure visuality that denies the body. A privilege granted to him by the particular colonized ethos that, in Brazil, works through the belief of the white subject



to be part of the metropole center, devoid of race.<sup>21</sup> But for the racialized Other, as many have shown, the effect of film was that of a constant machine of comparison that would produce Otherness in oneself through the visibility granted to racial difference.<sup>22</sup>

Film is particularly important in this process because, by its very structure of embodied vision whose movement is visible through its restrictive *framing*, it constantly reminds one of one's own limited physical position.<sup>23</sup> Its most basic feature is its physicality. The enlightened transcendentality of the *humanitas*, critically described by Sakai as the foundation of a discursive geopolitical map of the modern ethos, finds in the very act of seeing through film a constant obstacle. Not only is one reminded of one's own body—that which the white male-bodied Faria tries to dissolve into an immaterial and a-historical “image”—but also the racialized modernist elite is constantly reminded, by the images of white bodies in circulation on the screen, that one carries a race to the very eyes they desire to occupy.

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<sup>21</sup> The discourse on whiteness in the early twentieth century Brazil was itself embedded in a temporal debate over the whitening of the population, whose bodies would be the universal default—the only ones who would be granted the possibility of not carrying a body and a race. About this, see Lilia Schwarcz, *O Espetáculo das Raças*, 1993. On the filmic screen, “good cinema” in early twentieth century Brazil was the one who appeased the white elite by only showing “beautiful white bodies.” About this, see Roberto and Fernão Ramos (org), *História do Cinema Brasileiro*.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano's analysis of the “whitening” of Japanese silent film starts in her *Nippon Modern*. Also, see my discussion of Murayama Tomoyoshi in Chapter 3. A famous quote by Tokugawa Musei, the most celebrated *benshi*, describes the experience of the encounter with the image of a white actress on the screen as a simultaneous ecstatic daze and a deep “grief for being Japanese” (quoted in Deguchi, 106).

<sup>23</sup> See Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: a phenomenology of film experience*, 1992.

The task of the modernist peripheral elite, then, would be to find ways—critical or conservative—to deal with such “anthropological ambivalence,” which film seems to be constantly emphasizing. Either producing the injunction to “modernize” rejecting one’s body, or pushing back against racialized hierarchies. While Faria circumvents the restriction of vision by detaching it from the body—and from the political—conflating image and its material mediation, Tanizaki does the opposite by affirming film as an interruptive perceptual machine of commodification. A close look into the theory contained in Tanizaki’s *Mr. Aozuka’s Story* (*Aozuka-shi no Hanashi*, 1926) shows how the absence of a total encompassing concept of the image works as a political response to the paradigm of the anthropological ambivalence by emphasizing interruption, materiality, and the physical address to the spectator; while de-emphasizing the epistemic power emanating from the image.

The novella *Mr. Aozuka’s Story* was published in the journal *Kaizō*, in three installments over the course of three months (August, September, October) in the year of 1926, almost ten years after “The Present and Future of Moving Pictures.” It is interesting to see how, in the decade that separates the first essay from the fictional text, the status of film as a surface-phenomenon is radicalized to the point of dissolution. The fictional text traces a complex, succinct, and multi-layered ontology of the moving image and its relation to other types of image, almost as a response to the earlier essay on the future of film, and anticipating his 1933 essay on aesthetics *In Praise of Shadows* (*In’ei Raisan*). It offers what the text calls a “film-philosophy,” in which a unified concept of “image” disappears, constituting a system of technology, imagination, and commodity that is inseparable from the body of the spectator.

The novella tells its story in two temporal layers: one is the posthumous epistolary address, in which the narrator, the film director Nakata Susumu, explains to his wife, the actress Yurako, the reasons of his death. We read the letter with Yurako, the addressee, while we experience the unfolding of the second narrative layer contained in it: the chance encounter between Nakata and the old man Mr. Aozuka, an anonymous fan of his work, at a bar. Along with Yurako, we discover that Nakata died not of tuberculosis, but due to the multiplication of Yurako's filmic image in Nakata's films. As we get to know, Yurako is a big star, called by Aozuka the "Japanese Marie Prevost," in reference to the Hollywood star, following the same pattern of the "complex of whiteness" that haunts Tanizaki's relation with film.<sup>24</sup> Up to the point of the narrative, Yurako's career had consisted in providing her body-as-image to the lenses of her film director husband Nakata, whose films are, in the opinion of his fan Aozuka, "the only films worth seeing in Japan today," better than "those of the West," even though they are usually called "American imitations." (En 280, Jp 170)<sup>25</sup>

Through the image of Yurako's bodies, says Aozuka, Nakata's films have made Japan "become light and radiant." (En 280, Jp 170)

Nakata's films correspond to the future of the moving pictures as theorized by Tanizaki a decade earlier, responding to the call for a visual structure centered around

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<sup>24</sup> Another famous example is the novel *Naomi* (*Chijin no Ai*), whose main character is described by the narrator as a white-skinned young Japanese woman who resembles Mary Pickford. Even her name, he remarks, sounds "Western." See Tanizaki, *Chijin no Ai*, 1925.

<sup>25</sup> Block translations of "Mr. Aozuka's Story" are from Thomas Lamarre's published version, whose reference is indicated by "En," with its correspondent in Japanese indicated by "Jp." Specific terminology, words and expressions are my translations, with the Tanizaki's Japanese terms indicated in brackets.

the interruption of the close-up, the capture of the white-skinned female body, to achieve a “crystallization” of the physical world through an aesthetic intervention in it. Yurako’s presence is necessarily mediated by the filmic medium, turned into a chopped-up montage of different poses:

rather than “drama,” they amounted to nothing more than a collage of different poses in which she displayed her youthful body, in a shower of lights, in a cascade of silks, about to take a bath. All was fine as long as he impressed her body, frame after frame, on countless meters of celluloids. Nakata saw her as material from which to carve out various seals, which he would stamp with great clarity on paper of the finest quality, carefully positioning them with close attention to the red inking. (Eng, 277; Jp 164)

This description of Nakata’s filmic style represents exactly the ontology of film described by Tanizaki, showing that the “crystallization” of film that he envisions is inseparable from the commodification of the female body, decomposed in poses and replicated. Nakata’s films are collages of Yurako’s body, which is imprinted on celluloid as a reproducible seal. Her body is an image-commodity, an *icon* of the cinema industry, produced by Nakata's lenses; but a commodity whose materiality is *not* reducible to either the filmic celluloid strip nor the image it (re)produces.

Tanizaki’s theory of the image relies precisely on the open-ended and relational nature of the image, which is never unified neither with its medium nor with the spectator. As mentioned earlier, the core of his approach to film is the screen-dimension of the image: not what it gives access to, but how it makes itself perceived.

The central issue in Tanizaki's story is the deep knowledge that the old man Mr. Aozuka acquires of Yurako's body through repetitively and obsessively watching Nakata's movies. The obsessed fan's mental images (*gen'ei*) reveal the man's visual intimacy with all details of the actress's body as it is shown in Nakata's films. Since the organic body decays, Aozuka claims in his Platonic "film-philosophy," it cannot hold the Being or Substance (*jittai*) of the actress. Film, overcoming the effects of time on organic matter, would make the physical body disposable. Filmic fascination would stem from the rendering of the organic into image, through the dismemberment of the totality of the body, as is exemplified by Aozuka's explanation:

Consider a man who has only studied her on film, who goes to see close-ups of certain scenes five or six times in order to pinpoint the details of every part of your wife's body, her shoulders, her breasts, her buttocks, to the point that now even with his eyes closed spectral images of her flicker in his head, and thus he gained complete knowledge of her. (En 284)

Tanizaki, since his late 1910's film theory, does *not* subscribe to the paradigm of the absorbed spectatorship in front of a natural mirror, represented by the long take.<sup>26</sup> In "Mr. Aozuka's Story," he takes this premise further: filmic presence is achieved by *poses*, which capture parts of bodies and reproduces them in several different media—film, still photographs, drawing, mental images, dolls. It is because film does *not* contain movement in itself—but rather produces its synthesis in the spectator's bodies—that it can travel across different territories and establish a relation between

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<sup>26</sup> Here, I am in disagreement with Lamarre.

several media, several bodies, and become a desired commodity. The impression of movement, Tanizaki seems to claim, is in the body's contact with the apparatus of film, in the very phenomenon of perception and mediation, which is not just a relay but a poietic event in the body that is also what enables its commodification.

Both Aozuka, who obsessively pursues Yurako's images and cannot stop reproducing in drawing all shots ever taken of her, and Nakata, who is consumed with guilt for having exposed his own partner, end the story destroyed by the effect of film over the spectators. The "potential semiotic threat" that Mary Ann Doane ascribed to the close-up becomes a physical threat in Tanizaki's story. Film experience is marked by the distortion of distance and scale in combination with its capacity to make movement seem like an arrest—which is the very process of commodity fetishization: to turn a circuit of movement, from workers' body to product, into an abstract, universal, and fixed value. Tanizaki's writing calls attention to the fact that filmic universality is contingent upon its ability to be fetishized.

It is worth going back to Marx's definition of the fetishized commodity as "a social thing whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses" (Marx 320-1). The fetish—which itself defines a commodity—comes as a metaphysical and transcendental veil that represses the physicality of objects and the "peculiar social character of the labor that produces them" (Marx 321). It requires a temporal marker that falsifies, producing the transcendental fetish (the hiding of the actual labour) as an immanent objectivity, a marker that is actualized precisely in the moment of the exchange. Commodity fetishism, as defined by Marx, is the *fixity* that is thrown into *circulation* in a totalized and equalized market, in which "the magic and

necromancy that surrounds the products of labour” standardizes and suppresses those isolated workers (Marx 324).

If the close-up is the fetish, Tanizaki’s ontology seems to affirm that film is *par excellence* a machine of commodification: since its movement *comes from* and *arrives at* stasis, but is still perceived as movement. By emphasizing film’s already-fetishized nature, Tanizaki’s theory comments on the fascination effects of which it is captive. We get to know that from “extremely large-scale photographs [...] bits of old film that had been cut from various pictures,” tirelessly bought from distant movie theaters “in segments as short as a frame or two and as long as ten to twenty frames” (“Mr. Aozuka’s Story” 300), are used to assemble dolls that the old man “called the Substance of Yurako, in various positions such as sleeping, standing, opening your thighs, twisting your torso, not to mention all the obscene positions of which I cannot write.” (“Mr. Aozuka’s Story” 299) Modeled after illegally purchased frames of the actress’s body extracted from Nakata’s movies, each doll reproduces a photogram or a short fraction of a second—being a body posture, an interruption, *and* a point of view.

It is precisely the *deconstructability* of film’s material quality that makes possible the inscription and reproduction of the body in so many different forms of image, as an industrial commodity that is spread over the national territory. But the montage that emerges can never exhaust all possible ways of seeing and grasping, they are different instants of a movement that does not come into being. The flow of Yurako’s “Substance” is ambiguous, since it can be materialized, by analogy, everywhere, on film, drawing, dolls, and even other women’s bodies, while at the same time it is never contained in a total stable synthesis. The old Aozuka cannot stop

making his dolls, because although he believes the substance is there, it is never brought to a full closure.

His work resembled that of a paleontologist. Just as the paleontologists would excavate, from deep in the earth, skeletal remains from centuries long past, then reassemble the animal as it lived thousands of years ago, so he would gather together the bits and pieces of your body scattered hither and thither through Japan, then try to construct a single total You. (“Mr. Aozuka’s Story” 301-3)

The analogy between film and paleontology emphasizes film’s archival powers, which Philip Rosen has called film’s “mummy complex,” the first fundamental relation between film and historicity. Tanizaki places history in an open-ended temporality, since every part produces a change in the whole image of history. Based on the photogram, to excavate and pursue history as such means that the film, in the materiality of its existence, loses its movement with a decrease in the number of frames to a point of apparent exhaustion: “It’s quite strange, isn’t it, that, as the film travels, a scene with twenty frames at the start is gradually whittled down to twenty frames, then ten, and in particularly bad instances, vanishes all together?” (“Mr. Aozuka’s Story” 301) The interesting thing is that this trade, carried out throughout the national territory as an “paleontological excavation,” happens on the spatial transition from the modern urban center of Tokyo towards the interior and smaller towns, precisely where, according to the modern discourse, the “past” does not need to be preserved because it is always already there, unlost.



Tanizaki draws an ontology of an image-matter that is cinematic inasmuch as it produces *movement* while not *moving*. It reminds us that the photogram is *not* the still photograph, because it carries with itself the memory and the future suggestion of movement. It is a unit that is not self-contained and which exists not as only an index of *pastness*, but also as an index of a future movement produced in the body of the viewer. The photogram contains movement in virtuality, which comes to actualization through and in the perception of the spectator. It is “the genetic element” of perception, as Deleuze has argued, because perception entails change insofar as it entails embodiment, binding image and apparatus in the perceiving body. As Deleuze explains:

the photogramme is inseparable from the series which makes it vibrate in relation to the movement which derives from it. And, if the cinema goes beyond perception, it is in the sense that it reaches to the *genetic element* of all possible perception, that is, the point which changes, and which makes perception change, the differential of perception itself. (*Movement-Image* 83)

Paying attention to the terminology deployed by Tanizaki, it is possible to see the importance of these differences: the filmic reel on which the images are printed is called by the English transliteration of the word “film” (*firumu*), while when referred to as a narrative apparatus it is called “cinema” (*eiga*). The medium of film is termed “moving pictures” (*katsudō shashin*) but each specific film is called only “movement” (*katsudō*), while the visual phenomenon of film is simply called “photograph” (*shashin*). That is, the particular visual phenomenon of film is split

between movement (*katsudō*) and photographic stasis (*shashin*). Tanizaki suggests, by his differential terminology, that there is not only one dimension to “film.”

The same process of differentiation happens in relation to how visible phenomena are named. Yurako’s bodily poses are referred to as “figure” or “appearance” (*sugata*), while when rendered in drawing by the old man’s memory they are defined by their “shape” (*katachi*). A mental image produced by the encounter with filmic image is termed “illusion” (*gen’ei*), a word compounded of the characters of “phantom” (幻: *gen*, *maboroshi*) and “shadow” (影: *ei*, *kage*), but the filmic image *on screen* is sometimes called a “shadow” (*kage*), which the Mr. Aozuka opposes to the idea of Substance (*jittai*), which would carry no visible appearance but would, nonetheless, connect Yurako to other physical bodies, such as the white Canadian film star Marie Prevost’s.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, the main characteristic of *filmic* visibility is defined by the fact of its *luminosity*—it is “shadow and light” (*kage to hinata*)—which becomes visible only by the *interruption* of the screen. (En 286; Jp 184) Tanizaki suggests, at the level of concepts instead of that of narrative, that the minimum element of film consists of a material interruption of light. The visible, it seems to suggest, depends on the material condition of visual perception.

Although mostly rendered in English through the word “image,” the text makes use of several different terms to describe what is visible, making constant shifts

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<sup>27</sup> The translation by Thomas Lamarre privileges fluidity in the reading, so it is not consistent in the terminology, sometimes deploying “shadow-image” for *kage* (shadow), “spectral image” for *gen’ei* (hallucination), sometimes “phantom image” (290), which is also used in the case of the drawings (*katachi*) and the figure of her body (*sugata*). Other times it conflates different visual phenomena in simply the word “image.”

according to the material support in which visibility happens and is processed. The image is part of the apparatus (*dispositif*) of film, which is defined by its mediation: the perception of perception itself, which is neither transcendental nor universal, but transnational in its circulation, and localized in its actualization. It, at once, enables and dissolves commodification. Against the common fascination with filmic transcendental temporality—exemplified by the approach of Octávio de Faria—Tanizaki refuses to give ontological ground to filmic synthesis by neither unifying a concept of film, nor of image.

Tanizaki's conceptualization of the filmic image is characterized not by the common dichotomy between real/false, interior/exterior, deep/superficial. It does not subscribe to a "phenomenology of the inside," as Akira Lippit describes the particular a-visibility of film as related to the search for the "depths" of "the movements of life" (58) since movement is neither on the image nor on the screen. It is not even defined by the screen's surface-dimension. It is rather defined by being a product of light—electrical light—which is neither movement, nor stasis, but a visual matter only once it is interrupted. If, on the experience level, Tanizaki's theory emphasizes the body as inescapable, its critical relation to the "anthropological ambivalence" spurred by the modernizing discourse also lies in its (non)definition of the image, which emerges as a *relation* between material apparatuses of industrial capitalism's and its processes of commodification. Movement is localized as an *assemblage* produced within one's body.

*Geopolitics of Perception: the dislocation of movement*

Much can be read into the two “peripheral” theoretical propositions analyzed here. However, as a brief conclusion, I will return to some aspects, convergent and divergent, in order to raise some questions about the “geopolitics of perception”: the relation between image, apparatus, geopolitics, and body. The starting point of the “geopolitics of perception” contained in Octávio de Faria and Tanizaki Jun’ichiro’s film theories can be summarized in two statements that derive from the analyses of their anxieties and aspirations. They can be thus described:

- (1) Film, as an apparatus, responded to, and brought about, a shifting definition of visual perception, in which the relation between body, nation (geopolitical location), and historical narrative (world-history) seem to be on the cusp of changing—and this would be, for the peripheral subject, film’s promise and task, in a moment in which its very shape as a medium seemed yet to be defined;
- (2) While the aesthetic experience of temporal and spatial distortions provided by film are related to modern anxieties with the loss of the control over time and space—which creates the demand to *visualize* temporal change and of *eliminate* distance—film dislocates the place of the spectator from the centrality of a “pure” detached observer—an eye with a brain—to an embodied and located subject, whose dislocation evinces the impossibility of the desired control.

The two statements are mutually related and (over)determined by the demands of modern capitalism—the management of time required by the production of exchange-value; and the management of bodies in their existence as labor force for the nation, in

which the biopolitics of racial and sexual difference converge in the organization of an international division of labor, informing the metaphysics of national difference. Filmic experiment on perception thus carries both a historical promise of eliminating geopolitical distance; while it also reveals historical, physical, temporal restriction through the failed desire for a transcendental universal subject—that is, the failure of sameness.

Although the evolutionary narrative usually places film in the scientific timeline of the path to the capture of evidentiary truth, the medium of film has actually brought perception to a place of doubt. Instead of affirming objectivity in grasping movement, following the scientific discourse of the late nineteenth-century, film has actually thrown the relation between movement and visibility under suspicion. The question of whether synthetic movement is true or not—that is, if the movement seen on screen is actual movement—is fundamental for building disputing ontologies of film.<sup>28</sup>

Whereas Faria, dreaming with a future in which films would have no cuts, will affirm the filmic image as a *formless* pure continuity and absolute movement that delivers a vital force of life—that is, privileging the visible image over the materiality of the technological apparatus—Tanizaki will suggest that the ground of film is its photogram, which holds an intimate relation to the close-up and the disorientation it causes on spectators by the movement-effect it spurs. If to Faria movement is in the image, to Tanizaki it is in the spectator's body.

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<sup>28</sup> For a rich debate on the relation between movement, scientific discourse, and temporal analysis, see Jimena Canales, *A Tenth of a Second*, 2009.

The location of movement, and its visibility, are directly related to the definition of perception as a question of time. Faria will desire an image that is absolute in a continuity, a totality with no engagement to the body but rather as a connection to a transcendental and universal life. His rejection of revolutionary politics was based precisely on his rejection of revolutionary time: the possibility of the new, the interruption of continuity, stemming from material, localized, and physical clashes. As a conservative catholic thinker, Faria's thought was premised on an idea of the human that was devoid of historicity, of place, and body.

From the periphery, Faria imagines a future for the filmic image that would liberate the elite from its peripheral spatial constraints, based on a universality that is not of the apparatus, but of an absolute image that would convey a total life, received by a disembodied vision. His conservative political thought emerges in his film theory through his adamant rejection of interruption in favor of a no-body's "life" in an endless present. Movement, in this sense, becomes the opposite of change. The question for the medium shifts from the possibility of seeing movement to the desirability of it. Theorizing a pure image with no apparatus, Faria imagines the possibility of *vision without perception*, or an *image without mediation*—which is the only way to make it an object outside of time.

Tanizaki starts from a different point of departure: there is no escape from the body to the racialized subject. Race intervenes as a visible marker of embodiment that cannot be escaped. His theory of filmic perception is a material theory of the body: movement is in the body, both in its formation and in its fetish effects. The image is the passage and the interruption of light received by the spectator's body. The actual

film is a series of frames, each carrying with it a suggestion of movement, but each also being a commodity in the modern and global apparatus of cinema. The relation between image and temporality is that of a constant change, even when one is halted under the fetish. If Tanizaki—like Faria—has to deal with the question of being the peripheral spectator for the commodification of the global imaginary of Hollywood, he offers a different response to the problem posed by the desire of globality. There is no escape from locality, which does not exclude the possibility of seeing.

Ultimately, the central question is that of a politics of perception that is already understood as a relation between image, apparatus, and body. The novelty of film, in this sense, was not its sharper realism, but rather its displacement of *movement* from visibility and to the domain of embodied affect. These two propositions represent two poles of an ontological dispute that will animate much of the way filmic perception and synthetic movement were thought and practiced in the peripheral modernist sphere and its position of power and desire. The political implications of opening movement, and change, to the physically static will be further explored in the coming chapters.

## CHAPTER 2: TWO FOSSILS OF THE AVANT-GARDE

### *Fossils of the Avant-garde*

*Limite* (Mário Peixoto, 1931) and *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta Ichipēji*, Kinugasa Teinosuke, 1926) are two mythological objects. When released around the late 1920s to the early 1930s, respectively in Brazil and Japan, both were hailed as the first true cinematic accomplishments in their national spaces, but were lost in the following decades to reemerge only four decades later. Their long disappearance from the public view, however, helped inscribe them deeper in the history of film as lost masterpieces, couched in the critical discourses that placed them as missing links of global filmic avant-gardes, and evidences for the globality of their local modernities. Partaking in the aesthetic experimentation and enthusiasm with the possibilities of the filmic medium, they were envisioned as a local response, or sometimes synthesis, to the historical avant-gardes that had been coming out of Europe. They were received as tokens of a modern achievement, an amalgam of desires for a medium that was still in the making. The medium to come, the usual critical discourse asserted, had finally arrived in those peripheral spaces with these films.

The common aspects that join the discursive constructions and the filmic body of both objects are unexpectedly numerous. Not only were they products built upon publicity campaigns in the print media selling them as national achievements in filmic art, but also both films were received in a superlative way, and remained covered in an aura of mythological fascination in the following decades until today, even though they were much less *seen* than commented. After a decades-long material absence, in



which they produced ostensibly present lacunae in their national filmic imaginaries, they re-emerged to the public's view in the 1970s: in 1971, Kinugasa accidentally found the almost complete reels (but one) of his film in his house, which were deemed lost to combustion in 1950; and Peixoto's film had its long process of precarious restoration finally concluded in 1977, after its history of material decay that included also a confiscation by the civil-military regime. Both films had lost chunks of their bodies, due to poor conservation and to their very material existences as highly combustible nitrate films. But their non-existence as visible objects had informed their roles as landmark films of modern-nations-to-come. The decades of their uncertain material presence seem to deepen, not without a hint of irony, their inscriptions in the historical narratives of their local modernities.

"To rediscover a lost film is similar to discovering a new celestial body," wrote film critic Yomota Inuhiko in a recent essay on *A Page of Madness*, revealing the enduring fascination with this avant-garde object (181).<sup>29</sup> This celestial body travelled the world and built its place in film historiographies as a "pure fossil of the glorious avant-garde," in Yomota's words: less as a film, more as an object to be "exhibited" and "appreciated" (Yomota 198). Just as in the case of Peixoto's *Limite*, which repeatedly figured as an enchanted object of film criticism in Brazil over the decades, and has just recently been voted, again, the "best Brazilian film of all times" by the Brazilian Critics Association, in 2015, and revered with the release of its restored copy

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<sup>29</sup> All translations from Japanese and Portuguese here are mine, except from when otherwise noted.

by the canonizing World Film Project run by Martin Scorsese.<sup>30</sup> Ever since their first screenings, critical discourses tend to repeat the astonishment with both films, seen as the first national achievements in “pure film art,” always under a discourse of affirmation of the national in a global stage: the achievement of the “universal.”

Yomota describes *A Page of Madness* as “a film one can consider the apex of Japanese film history, in perfect conditions. It was a big event that filled in a missing link in film history” (181). João Luiz Vieira, in 1987, writes about *Limite* as Brazil’s “best contribution to the international avant-garde.” (137)

Taking Yomota Inuhiko’s celestial cue, I recall Walter Benjamin’s notions of the image, and of the historical object, to point towards a different constellation for the films. In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin writes that “History decays into images, not into stories” (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 476). “It is owing to this monadological structure that the historical object finds represented in its interior its own fore-history and after-history” (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 475). The historicity of the fossil is similar to that of the monad, in which a glimpse into its different layers reveals its different historical temporalities—lived and imagined—which are produced by the repetitive gesture of return to it. Fossilization entails an enchanted unearthing, in a repeated gesture of discovery-production of its layers, which I will, at least partially, attempt to unfold here not in their “truth” but in their aporias and tensions with the very experience that the films spur.

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<sup>30</sup> Bruce Williams, in “The lie that told the truth: (Self) publicity strategies and the myth of Mario Peixoto’s *Limite*,” does a retrospective of all discourses that built the myth of *Limite*.

The fossilization of the films has turned them into monuments—monuments of cinema, but also monuments of the modern colonized ethos, constantly shaped by the desire to partake in a world-historical mapping defined by the parameters of the metropole and its avant-garde. This is attested by the extensive array of monographs devoted to deciphering their textualities—sometimes perpetuating their mythology through eulogistic close analyses, or at other times in order to understand their origins in film-historical researches. A fossil, after all, spurs the desire for origins as a constituent part of its mythology. As fossils, these fetish-objects of modernity exist in repeated scenes of arrival, under different constellations that illuminate their bodies each time.

The films' cult value comes largely from their supposed overcoming of their locality, achieving a "universal" aesthetic experience that would set the spectators free from their geocultural "particularity."<sup>31</sup> The discourses that shape them as myth-objects usually attribute to them the status of avant-garde not for the destructive ethos that would define the idea of avant-garde, but rather for their "suitability" to what was happening in Europe then: the discourse and codification of a "peripheral" avant-garde functions not as the figure of the rupture and the leap, but rather as a "catching up."<sup>32</sup> It is as if the discourse of origins would find in the fossil the image of European

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<sup>31</sup> For a critique of the dichotomy of particular/universal, see Naoki Sakai, "Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism," 1989.

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Abel has read how critical discourses on *A Page of Madness*, contemporaneous or recent, place the film in the avant-gardes not as "radical breaks" away from the past—which is the usual understanding of the (European) avant-gardes, but rather as a "catching up" with "European technical trends." (74) See Abel's article for a succinct overview of the critical reception of the film in the occasion of its release.

modernity, performing a fascination with sameness that seems almost opposite to the ethos of the avant-garde. The point is *not* that these films are not avant-garde because they brought no rupture neither with current aesthetics, nor with institutional structures, as Jonathan Abel complains—the point is that the very idea of “avant-garde” meant something else in both institutional and aesthetic terms for the non-“Western” nations: the teleology of the avant-garde appears clearly in the future-desiring peripheral avant-garde that seemed trapped in an inescapable promise and longing. This geo-temporal cleavage, present in the very body of the films, is what is of interest here, since it connects the temporal structure of filmic perception with the world-historical project that housed it not as confirmation but as an evidence of its failure. That is their theoretical work.

In this chapter, I turn away from the fossilized fascination in order to look at the discourses that shaped the fossils, and the aesthetic experience they sought to engender. What is in and around those objects? How do they theorize film? They embody an experimentation on perception that performs and produces a temporal anxiety around an impossible desire to overcome their very perceptual restrictions—mirroring the politics of the peripheral avant-garde that sought to overcome historical and geopolitical situatedness. My approach to these films stand not on their mythology, but on a point of intersection that seeks to understand what is the media-political workings of these “fossils of the avant-garde”: which imagens and theories do they activate, what aesthetic experience do they aim at, and which desires and imaginations do they reveal?

Several times described as sorts of riddles, mysterious beings followed by their

mesmerized spectators, the films' textual dimension *and* their lost material parts converge to produce an experience of visual endurance and fascination with their hermetic refusal of legibility. That is, their aesthetic politics and experience are contingent upon their materiality. Common readings since the very moment they appeared as discursive objects in the public sphere focus on their experimental and rhythmic montage, making use of the notions of purity and absorption, placing them as the opposite of "rationality"— "pure and absolute cinema." Directly connected to political-theoretical endeavors of a cosmopolitan local discourse on aesthetics—the "New Perception School" in Japan (*Shinkankaku-ha*), and the Chaplin Club in Brazil (see chapter 1)—they respond to certain anxieties regarding perception that reveal political questions related to the nature of time and its geopolitical cleavage in world-historical narratives. Understanding mediation as a political-phenomenological question, this chapter will engage a temporal reading of these objects, in dialogue with their discursive milieu, in order to unravel the various forces that converged in the fascination with film in those peripheral spaces to/of modernity.

### *Experiments*

What does it mean for a film to be *experimental*? What does an "experiment" consist of? Film theorist Gertrude Koch sees film as an "experiment on human beings," taking the idea of *experimental cinema* to a different sphere, one that is directly related to the modern scientific rationality not through its mechanical indexicality. Instead, what defines such an experimentation, she claims, is the capacity to *dislocate* the observer through perception:

The fascination that the experiment has held as a technologically grounded cultural technique of desiring desire against any and all skepticism is above all emphasized where the experimental arrangement directly targets human perception, that is, the *impact* of an experiment, which is supposed to be new and to take place in the interplay between the reception of the senses and that of affect. (Koch 101)

Inscribed in the scientificist search for visible proof, the filmic medium however scaled up the fact that mediation has its thickness, acting upon both sides: “observation modifies the fact observed, since there is no such thing as observation disembodied from all physical action, nor is there intelligence without an organ nor a man without a body.”(Koch 101) In film, Koch suggests, “the spectator is animated by the animation and displaced in a specific way into the state of vitality.” (101) What is at stake in the “state of vitality” produced by the experimental act of filmic observation is precisely the *political place of mediation*—“the interplay between the reception of the senses and that of affect”—that opens up a zone of thrust between the physicality of the world and the spectator’s desire, between body and affect. It is in this interstitial zone that the two films here discussed work as “experimental films”: not only for the fact that they were actively experimenting with their medium, but, more importantly, because their fascination with filmic perception reveals the gap between sensorial apparatus and historical desire that mirrors the discourse of the avant-garde in the “periphery” of the European sphere.

The story of Kinugasa’s *A Page of Madness* takes place in a mental hospital.

The protagonist is the hospital janitor (Inoue Masao), a former sailor who struggles with guilty over his wife's mental condition (Nakagawa Yoshie), hospitalized for having drowned their baby child while he was away in the sea. His wife's mental illness becomes a threat to the marriage of their teenage daughter (Ījima Ayako) with a well-established bourgeois young man. Haunted by the madness of the wife, the film shows the gradual loss of the janitor's sanity, as the spectators experience with him a series of delirious visual montages, which place him and the viewer alongside the confined patients. The actual plot, however, is nearly unintelligible. The most important aspect is the aesthetic experience produced by its montage and camera work, through the film's relation to madness not only as representation, but also as a perceptual regime that is characteristic of film: fast cuts, double exposure, distorted images, blurry movements.

Mario Peixoto's *Limite* is also a film about perception and perceptual restriction, although the general tone of the film is, instead of Kinugasa's fast paced montage, a slow and stretched temporality—albeit always modulated by gusts of abrupt movement. The vague plot tells the story of two women (Tatiana Rey, Carmen Santos) and a man (Raul Schnoor) adrift on a boat in the open sea. Shot on the Southern coast of the state of Rio de Janeiro, the presence of open nature does not convey a romantic harmonic existential openness, but rather a situation in which the bodies have no physical escape—a sort of temporal trap, an imposed present tense, which is doubled in the film form itself through repetition, abrupt camera movements, and interplay between fast and slow shots.

Both films narrate stories of physical *restriction* and mental *disorientation*,

portraying madness through an “avant-garde” film style that, in its formal experimentation, highlights the filmic machine (*máquina*, *kikai*) and its presence. Their overt explorations of the possibilities of filmic visuality thus relate the human bodies on screen not only with the bodies of the spectators, but also suggest a convergence between film and body engendered by the modes of interpellation used by the very construction of the films: speed, length, clarity. The very constitution of the body of the film—the sequence of mobile shots—becomes an experiment on the body of the spectator, whose perception assembles the perception of the film. The mediated temporality of the films is made constantly visible, revealing a politics of the body that will be understood in the specificity of the “film bodies” they animate: the materiality of the film itself (the body of the film), the visible space provided to the bodies on screen, and their impact of the spectator’s body.

Through ostensible use of cross-cutting, juxtaposition, rapid and non-narrative camera movements, and many other technical devices that manipulate time and space, the films draw our attention to what Vivian Sobchack calls their own “bodies”: “the physiology and anatomy of cinematic technology,” that is, their materiality as a medium. (Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* 171) But, if “cinematic technology’s function of materially embodying perception and expression as a situated, finite, centered and decentering lived-body” is a reminder that film brings about the inescapable restriction of any subject-consciousness, as Sobchack’s film-phenomenology claims, Peixoto’s and Kinugasa’s films’ fascination with their own film bodies and anatomies demands a step beyond the phenomenological reading. (Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* 167)



If film-phenomenology calls attention to the direct relation between the mode of perception of film and the mode of perception of subject in the world, it is not enough to stop the assessment there, at the risk of universalizing the categories mobilized: subject, world, body. Instead, the relation brought to the fore between the body of the film, the body in the film, and the body in front the film, calls for a critical reading of the affect of *restriction* that structures both Kinugasa's and Peixoto's film, paying attention to the *imbrication* between these three bodily instances and their modes of visibility: the restricted are female bodies, given to be seen by bodies in specific geographic contexts, in specific conditions of mobility. To read the geopolitics of perception inherent in the mode-of-being produced by film requires that we, at once, historicize the fascination with the technically mediated experience of film and understand that all bodies are politically determined, some more restricted than others. In other words, it is important to keep in mind that the lived-bodies that are summoned in dislocation and commutation by filmic mediation are located and determined—that is the node of its “experimentation,” the space between body and affect that, as Gertrud Koch suggests, is the territory of any experiment.

The centrality of the filmic technology as an issue addressed by the films appears through the exploration of the techniques particular to the medium. It is possible to understand the films as geo-historical experiments by the way they are invested with a desire for a modernity-to-come not based solely on their *representation*—as is the case of much of peripheral modernism's visual culture, which sought to bring modernity to the present through its representation—but also on the belief on the capacity of the filmic perception to surpass the restriction of the

human body. It responds, at once, both to the agenda of the international avant-garde, and also to a fascination with filmic perception per se, as a sort of disembodied sensorial apparatus.

The two dimensions, of experimentation and of representation, call for a politicization of the phenomenological understanding of the technological mediation of film; that is, of the several rapports it builds between film and body. Such understanding should consider film's effects on perception, and, at the same time, film's representative space: what it gives visibility to, and how it does so. Following these two dimensions—in phenomenology categorized as *perception* and *expression*; or, in other words, the dimensions of *experience* (perception) and of *visibility* (representation)—we can unravel the “desire for modernity” in the intersection between the invisible and the visible. It is by understanding the spaces of experience—the film body—in tandem with the spaces of visibility—the bodies in the film—that a critical approach to its “geopolitics of perception” can be essayed.

The question here is not the identification process analyzed by psychoanalytic film theory and ideology critique in classical narrative cinema, inasmuch as the films of Peixoto and Kinugasa do the opposite from hiding its apparatus: they foreground their filmic bodies, as if pointing towards their very being film. Instead of hiding, they *show*—not in a critical self-reflexive way, but rather in the mode of fascination: as if to remind the spectator what wonders modern filmic perception is capable of.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Psychoanalytic film theory has posited a convergence between spectator's eye and camera that would elude the apparatus of film. Focusing on classical narrative cinema, which privileges diegetic continuity to operate a suture between narrative, apparatus, and spectator's eye, hiding its own process of construction through invisible editing,

It is worth remembering that the two films were, so to say, the experimental objects of aesthetic agendas that were gaining traction in their cultural contexts. Both were considered as the first films “worth seeing” in their national intelligentsia, as if they were long-awaited bodies that would provide the modern agenda of the local avant-garde elites with a true national object of pride. It is even possible to say that both were the very first “national films” seen by many in their respective countries, since the filmic aspirations of these peripheral spaces were marked by a tacit rejection of the national cinema, deemed of lower quality.<sup>34</sup> *Limite* and *A Page of Madness* were the first national films positively received as “*real*” *cinema* (which was seen as a synonym for *modernity*) by many intellectuals and artists (including those present in this dissertation). Before becoming fossils, they were already seen as *rare objects* that carried an “international” aura, as metonymic objects of a desire that was attached to the medium itself both as a perceptual mode (the bodily senses) and as a historical fetish for modernity (affect). Animated by a desire for filmic perception, they imply an ontological statement on film that exists, precisely, on the gap between those two

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now canonical theories such as Christian Metz’s, Laura Mulvey’s, and Jean-Louis Baudry’s, have analyzed the convergence between the filmic and the spectator’s look, who would undergo a process of narcissistic identification with the bodies on screen, and scopophilic identification with the camera. Here I move away from this paradigm not only because it falls short of the multilayered and negotiated experience of spectatorship—such as famously pointed out by critical race theories such as bell hooks’s and Manthia Diawara’s—contingent upon many other variables particular to each subject and situation of seeing, but also because the films discussed here, I argue, have vision not only as *means* but also as *object* of fascination.

<sup>34</sup> A late 1940’s quote by famous Brazilian poet and intellectual Vinicius de Moraes shows well the state of self-deprecation of national cinema: “Brazilian cinema does not exist, or at least [...] is latent in two or three films that some talented directors made out of nothing.” (Vinicius de Moraes, quoted in Galvão, p.32) One of the “two or three films” is, in effect, *Limite*, long-idealized by Moraes.

dimensions.

*Disjointed time: Limite and the universal trap of waiting*



Figure 1: "Limite and its position in universal cinema"

(Revista Bazar, January 30, 1932)

Texts about *Limite* began to appear in several publications already during its pre-production and shooting. While the film gained special attention in theoretical and avant-garde oriented journal *O Fan*, it also appeared in the famous Hollywood-centered Brazilian journal *Cinearte*, showing the range of the spectrum its promise

reached. As is stated in big letters in the 30 January 1932 issue of *Bazar*, *Limite* caused an excitement by supposedly carving a place for Brazil in “universal cinema.” (Figure 1, above) The common aspects to all critical assessments include the fact that the film was made in Brazil, along with notes on its aesthetic style: its rhythmic and non-narrative montage. In the pages of *Cinearte*, in September 1930, for example, many months before *Limite*’s first screening, an anonymous author writes that:

Brazilian cinema must be different, much different from North-American cinema. It must, above all, be Brazilian cinema, in order to achieve its true artistic and even industrial objective. That is what the boys that are shooting “*Limite*” are doing. [...] “*Limite*” is the most original of all Brazilian films. It is a different film. A sort of Russian cinema... in diapers. Without that superb sense of the masses that fills films such as “*Storm over Asia*.” But already with some of the symbolism and strange rhythm of those films.<sup>35</sup>

In the historical teleology, Brazilian cinema is an infantile, “Russian cinema in diapers.” The fact that such a critical discourse already existed even before the film’s public screening reveals the level of expectation spurred by Peixoto’s first film—and the cultural capital it disposed of. The discourse around the film is enabled, of course, by the social milieu in Peixoto himself circulated: the cultural and economic elite of Rio de Janeiro, the capital of the Republic. But If *Limite*’s “nationality” pleased all spectrum of the critic—from the “market” and US-oriented *Cinearte* to the “artistic” aspiring theorists of *O Fan*—it was its film-body, its material and aesthetic

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<sup>35</sup> *Cinearte*, September 1930, p.n/a.

constitution, that seemed to make it stand out, almost as a direct outcome of the aesthetic positions defended by Octávio de Faria and his peers in the Chaplin Club. (see chapter 1)

In fact, it was the group of Octávio de Faria who organized the film's first screening, on May 17, 1931, at the Cinema Capitólio in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Figure 2, below). The introductory essay printed on the back of the invitation presents the critical discourse that would define the film in its life from that moment on:

the film is a huge rhythm, of despair and angst, of isolation and of limit, in which thousands small details evolve and complement at each moment. All image has its very clear inner rhythm and partakes, through its duration, in a general rhythm that, along with the others, constitutes the general rhythm of the film. (back of invitation)

Although there is no signature to the text, the vocabulary is reminiscent of Faria's theoretical essays—the focus on duration, the notion of the rhythm, the strive for a total pure and wordless image: “A film that is pure, in which the images speak for themselves, through their rhythm.” (back of invitation) The drive to totality—to the purity of an absolute and non-mediated filmic vision—is actualized in the rhetoric of exploration of the medium as generator of autonomous images, a pure and self-obliterating mediation.

## “L I M I T E”

“Limite”: o encontro de tres vidas aruinadas pela vida no limitado de um barco perdido no mar. Duas mulheres e um homem, tres destinos que a vida depois de ter limitado constantemente nos seus desejos e possibilidades reúne enfim no mais limitado dos espaços. Tudo é limite.

No film, a cada momento, tudo procura transbordar dos limites. A machina foge com os personagens para a natureza, atravessa mares e céos, persegue nuvens, vóa com as aves, corre com os homens alucinados, segue os movimentos dos galhos das arvores que o desespero da natureza parece estar chamando, cáe com os corpos desanimados dos homens, avança dez vezes sobre a fonte que jorra, fôge, corre, perde-se perseguindo o horizonte, caminhadas sem fim — mas quando volta é a mesma terra que encontra, o chão que é superficie e é fim de toda visão, a cerca que delimita, o limite que prende, limites de todas as especies. Mesmo no illimitado da natureza tudo é limite.

Uma serie de themas, de variações, de situações, de movimentos de vida que o realizador pegou, desenvolveu, construiu geometricamente para fazer um todo só, um film que fosse cinema puro, em que as imagens falassem por si, pelo seu rythmo. Sobre cada situação bordou mil variações, interpretou cada imagem no sentido do todo. Rythmou tudo.

Rythmos. Rythmos de todas as especies. O film é um grande rythmo, de desespero e de angustia, de isolamento e de limite, que mil pequenos rythmos desenvolvem e completam a cada momento. Toda imagem tem o seu rythmo interior bem nitido e faz parte pela sua duração de um rythmo de sequencia que constitue junto a outros o rythmo geral do film.

Tudo é rythmo no film. E' o rythmo que em cada situação define o limite, é o rythmo que no film todo situa a idéa e limita o sentido de cada aventura.

E' o rythmo que define o limite, é rythmo que define “Limite”.

Figure 2: back of invitation for *Limite*'s first screening by the Chaplin Club

On an essay published in July 17, 1931 in *O Jornal*, commenting on the screening of *Limite*, Octávio de Faria claims that, among many of the qualities of the film, Peixoto had managed to, so to say, de-localize nature, avoiding the “embarrassment” brought by the usual portrayal of nature exhibited by Brazilian film.<sup>36</sup> If natural landscapes were, by then, already an imprinted cliché-image of Brazil, Faria welcomes the capacity of the film-body—the construction of rhythm through alternation of long and short durations, the use of low angles, the possibility of scrutinizing various object—to “rip out” [*arrancar*] the visible from the natural, the landscape from its place. The body of the film would, thus, open the possibility of form to make content, its time, and space through rhythm, “images of “variable” sizes” and durations, sharp angles of

<sup>36</sup> Octávio de Faria, “Natureza e Rhythmo,” *O Jornal*, July 17, 1931, 14. It is important to remember that “filmes de natureza” (nature films) was also the name given to documentary productions made in the early decades of the twentieth century in Brazil, as opposed to the “filmes posados” (posed films).

the camera, and de-naturalizing juxtapositions. A mere object, such as a coconut tree, in this way, becomes, in film and through film, the foreshadowing of an electricity pole: an object that not only represents the very condition of possibility of film itself—electric light—but which signifies a long-awaited yet-to-come modernity (Figures 3–5).<sup>37</sup> To escape the global economy of exoticism, the “anatomy of the film” shows the desire of universality *through* a narcissistic fascination with its own existence as a perceptual experiment.



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<sup>37</sup> Vicente de Araújo de Paula, in his canonical and much contested history of early cinema in Rio de Janeiro, narrates how the much expected late arrival of electric light to the city made possible the flourishing of a supposedly thriving film culture in the capital of the first Republic—the much criticized myth of the *Belle Époque* of Brazilian cinema (1908-1911).





Figures 3, 4, 5

Some three decades after its release, Peixoto wrote a text, signing as Sergei Eisenstein—a strategy to attract investors to his new (never shot) project, producing a myth that survived for many years—titled “A Film from South America,” published in 1965. Using the Soviet director’s name, Peixoto described the film as “one inexorable scream,” in which “the whole is held up by a total freedom of vision.”<sup>38</sup> But the totality of visual freedom, in the film, is conveyed by immobile bodies, trapped in a boat somewhere in the Brazilian coast. In the now classic and much quoted hoax, the dialectics of locality and universality—tropical South America spoken by universal film name Eisenstein—is repeated diegetically, now cast upon the affective language of *anguish* and *restriction* that brings together the film’s melancholy tone, its geopolitics of avant-garde, and the very anatomy of its “film-body” to the realm of desire: wanting but not granting. The film shows (in its narrative) and performs (in its structure) an optical situation in which the body is summoned to the act of a total gaze by its impossibility, facing a constant frustration in the mode of a *waiting* that seems to

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<sup>38</sup> Mário Peixoto, “Um Filme da América do Sul,” 3.

embody the desire for totality inherent in its own fascination with filmic perception.



Figures 6 and 7: the “open” sea and the trapped woman



Figures 8 and 9: the other two trapped bodies in the boat

Whether be it the repetitive looping shots that approach objects and bodies, such as in the frantic scream on the top of mountain, or through the arresting close-up shots of objects and body parts, or when the camera wanders about by itself, the film highlights its capacity of seeing, as if filmic vision were its main object. While it gives off a feeling of exploration of filmic vision, it also impacts the visual experience as a constant remembrance of our submission to the mediation of the technology: velocity comes with *repetition*, and visibility comes with slow *arrest*, both producing the desire to escape the filmic frame dictated by the camera. The rigid aesthetic construction of

the film becomes a commentary on the limits, not freedom, of perception.

“South America, at first unknown and strange to my knowledge, stretches out to me this night, through the contrition of the images, the much disturbing trap of a universal language,” writes the imaginary Eisenstein in Peixoto's text, evoking the Griffithian utopia of a universal language, here however rendered a *trap*. (Peixoto, “Um Filme da América do Sul” 92) Is it a trap because an image is not a language? Or is it because, coming from South America, nothing can be universal? Rather, the “disturbing trap”—the trap of cinema and the trap of the modern discourse of the avant-garde—stems from the belief in the liberation through a universal that can only appear through the inescapably restrictive phenomenon of filmic perception. The film-body that calls our attention to the very fact of vision seems to state that a detached, universal, and disembodied seeing can only exist as an ever-repeating gesture of promise: it never comes, as an arrested movement that is temporally disjointed from bodily perception. The “experiment on animation” provided by technologically mediated perception functions as a reminder of the intrinsic *waiting*—never-arriving—contained in the displaced idea of the avant-garde to the periphery, performed by the temporal apparatus of frustration constructed by the film.

*Disjointed time: A Page of Madness and the promise of movement*

Kinugasa Teinosuke's *Kurutta Ichipēji*, in the English translation *A Page of Madness*, also has its “film-body” as a marker of its history. Scholars such as Aaron Gerow and Yomota Inuhiko have paid attention to the changes that the film has undergone since its first screening. From the original 2,142 feet negative, the current

version has 1,617 feet, shortening the 103-minute length to the current 78 minutes, if the projection is made in the original speed of 18 frames per second. The film today is composed of more than 800 shots, leaving it at 3.3 seconds per shot, significantly faster than the classical narrative code. From the first negative, through the suggestion of Yokomitsu Riichi in a preview screening which resulted in the elimination of all written words, to the moment of rediscovery of the lost negative followed by more editing out of several scenes by Kinugasa himself, what was gradually suppressed was precisely its “intelligible” part, the narrative layer in which the family drama evolves: the melodramatic sequences that tell the story of the daughter's marriage. The film's subtracted body produces a stronger sense of perceptual experimentation, producing in the “avant-garde fossil” as the unintelligible and so-called “purely” cinematic experience praised by many at the time of its release.

Jonathan Abel claims that the original film, with all its reels, would have been seen as a fully narrative film, paying attention to how the discourses before and after the film's reappearance in the mid-1970's follows this route. Despite the absence of intertitles or any other verbal inscription, Abel reminds us that the narration of the *benshi*, which was present in the film's first screenings, worked for joining what might seem now radically disjointed images. He suggests that the film—at the point of its inception—was more narrative than it might seem today. In fact, in order to further argue for his speculative claim, Abel imagines the higher narrativity of the film based on an assumption of a cognitive cultural difference. As he defends:

Significantly, Eisenstein had not seen *Kurutta ichipeiji* when he claimed that Japanese film was unaware of montage. If he had, he might have claimed that, though in the West montage may have been not only a revolutionary film technique but also a revolutionary mode of representation, in Japan (where, since the adoption of kanji in the 8th century, variously juxtaposed images created new meanings) it could be only the former. Thus, to a Japanese audience accustomed to finding meaning in combinations of discreet signs in both their films and language, Kurutta ichipeiji's "broken" narrative may not have been seen as so jarring as it is today by critics who are accustomed to more modern forms of filmic narrative. (Abel 77–78)

Following Eisenstein's famous Orientalist assumption—that the Japanese spectators already lived in a constant state of montage, due to the presence of the Chinese characters (*kanji*) in their written language—Abel suggests that, even without a *benshi* narration, Kinugasa's film's non-narrative experimental aspects would have been sutured by the culturally equipped Japanese cognitive apparatus. This particularizing culturalist hypothesis would then confirm the film's "real" characteristic, that of being a "product of its time" (Abel 76). Following many of the "historicizing" critical discourses, Abel wants to promote the convergence between the object and its historical present, affirming the scheme of difference of world-historical mapping.

In a 1926 article for the journal *Kinema Junpō*, the famous Marxist critic and theorist Iwasaki Akira wrote about *A Page of Madness*: "this film is the first world-class [*sekaiteki*] film made in Japan. [...] Even though from the start I did not understand the plot of the film, I think that the cinema, being more immediate and not about a story, from now on, will be something that is not to be understood upon

seeing. [...]” (quoted in Yomota 192) The bodily impact of those images, their “experimental” agency on the spectator, Iwasaki suggests, were constitutive of their mode of mediation: “Watching *A Page of Madness*, I felt this instinctive bodily fear, my body was tensioned, and my eyes were filled with tears of joy. Then I felt this respect for Kinugasa that I hadn’t felt for any filmmaker in Japan. He knows the cinema.” (quoted in Yomota 192) The first world-class film to bring “true cinema” to Japan was, contrary to what Abel imagines, one that could not be understood but only sensed. What is interesting to notice is not only that the film available to us— what remains after the loss of a big, and explanatory chunk of its narrative dimension —is the experimental facet, but also that the current movie was the one seen by the commentators’ eyes in 1926. Not only the experiment outlived the longer film, but it is almost as if the desire for it brought the experimental to the fore in the repeated excavations of the fossil. The impression of unintelligibility was part of the desire for a bodily medium to which the film’s aesthetic agenda responded to.

Just as Peixoto’s *Limite*, Kinugasa’s *A Page of Madness* was a film fascinated by its own being a film. As Abel himself notes, the film’s aura of modernity lied at the intersection of two versions of filmic purity promoted by the modernizing discourse called the “Pure Film Movement” (*Jun’eigageki Undō*): that of a seamless realist continuity in the modes of Hollywood classical narrative cinema, defended by theorists such as Kaeriyama Norimasa; and that of an embodied medium which blurs the boundaries between reality and dream by addressing the spectators as a bodily

disorienting experience, defended by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō.<sup>39</sup> Paradoxically, Kinugasa's project was also embraced by the modernist group called the "New Perception School" (*Shinkankaku-ha*), whose activities were concentrated around the literary journal *Bungei Jidai*. As stated in Yokomitsu Riichi's manifesto "The Perception Movement" (*Kankaku Katsudō*), published in the February 1925 issue of the journal, the group was engaged in the search for a "new perception" that would produce "the ability to perceive the objects themselves" in a direct sensorial rapport to "a pure object, an object that does not exist *in relation* to a subject," achieved through a modern type of writing that would be unmediated and direct. (Yokomitsu 4)

Irena Hayter sees this utopian immediate perception as the embodiment of the desire for the purification of vision from the other bodily senses, "a sensation that is somehow abstract, purged from the fleshy materiality of the body," part of the project of separating rationality from physicality, suitable for the purifying discourse of separation and control of the imperial subject in relation to its colonies. (Hayter 304)

Cinema's capacity to capture the moving world was thus seen as a big opportunity to achieve such an ideal. With writers such as Kawabata Yasunari, Kataoka Tappei, and Yokomitsu Riichi, they joined efforts with Kinugasa and wrote the script for *A Page of Madness* under the name of "New Perception Film Association" (*Shinkankaku Eiga Renmei*), which would function as the filmic actualization of their media-phenomenological agenda. At the intercrossing of all these imaginaries of mediation, what was at stake, similarly to the question that animated Peixoto's *Limite*, was the

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<sup>39</sup> See Kaeriyama Norimasa, et al. *Katsudō Shashingeki No Sōsaku to Satsueihō*. Shohan, Yumani Shobō, 2006 [1917]. On Tanizaki, see chapter 1.

promise brought by the filmic medium itself: the promise of a pure perception, enabled by a modern type of technology, in which the role of mediation was to enhance the subject's capacity of engaging with the physical world, paradoxically, in an unmediated way.

In Kinugasa's film, the fascination with the medium is performed through the experimentation with filmic perception through the visual experience of madness. Many scholars have shown how the choice of madness responds to its status as a modern social phenomenon. Around late Meiji and early Taishō period, madness was present in several media discourses of fear and fascination with mental illness, in the medicalization and disciplinarization of bodies central to modern biopolitics, and also in the proliferating discourses about the dangers of movie going and modern entertainment culture.<sup>40</sup> As a social phenomenon, madness was a prime index of modernization, and filmic realism would be suited to give visibility to such a modern subjectivity. As a modern endeavor, Kinugasa's filmic narrative, almost fully restricted to the confinement space of the psychiatric hospital, shows the gradual contagion of madness displayed by the janitor's wife to the janitor himself. Unlike other contemporaneous avant-garde films that would use madness as a trope for modernity—Robert Wiener's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, 1920) might be the most iconic one—in Kinugasa's film madness is not only

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<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, 2010; Aaron Gerow, *A Page of Madness: Cinema and Modernity in 1920s Japan*, 2008; Eric Cazdyn, *Flash of Capital: Film and Geopolitics in Japan*, 2002; and the previously mentioned Yomota Inuhiko. "Kinugasa Teinosuke *Kurutta Ichipeji* to 1920nen dai," 2015; Jonathan Abel, "Different from Difference: Revisiting *Kurutta Ichipeji*," 2001.



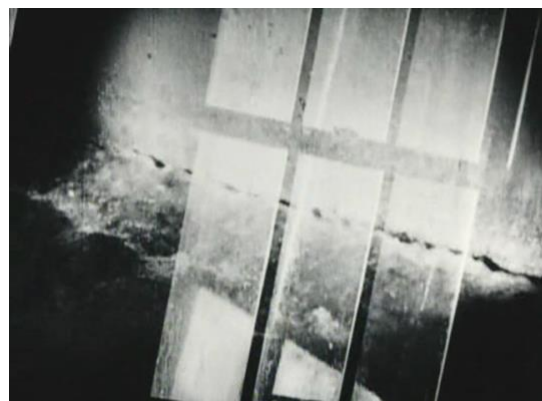
the object *of* representation, but it is representation's perceptual condition of possibility (Figures 10–11). If filmic perception promised the autonomy of vision—a vision without a body, born out of a machine—the dysfunctionality of madness is a suitable method through which to explore the medium, since it is vision beyond control.



Figures 10 and 11

Also an object of representation, madness functions to explore the medium of film, since its visibility emerges precisely on the outburst of movement out of stillness, in

the incongruous gestures that seem to exist for no reason, born out of those female bodies portrayed in the film. The mad gesture becomes the filmic sight/site *par excellence*: as a sheer exhibition of movement, movement per se, it reveals the use of the body *as* a medium for potential movement. But in Kinugasa's film, madness is also doubled by the very visual organization of the film, which strives to mirror the incongruous movements of those bodies in a fast-paced montage. The film's deep exploration of cinematic perception, with double exposures, distorted images, and invested in speed, delivers madness to/as the sensorial apparatus of the spectators, which is fully showcased already in the opening sequence, comprised of very quick intercalations of shots of an inmate dancing in a delirious way, a thunderstorm, musical instruments (a non-diegetic element that evokes the feeling of rhythm), and the confinement space of the hospital and its patients (Figures 12–17). The interpellation of the perception of movement happens through moving phenomena—the body, the rain—and as a moving mode of mediation—lighting, framing, and montage. The sequence reaches such a fast speed that, towards its end, it becomes close to unintelligible.





Figures 12–17: opening sequence.

It is known that the film's first cut had a few intertitles, which were completely excluded in its last cut upon Yokomitsu Riichi's request. Kinugasa, welcoming Yokomitsu's suggestion of cutting out all verbal inscriptions, explains it as a gesture of respect towards the filmic image (*eizō*). He writes: "When one, from the start, thinks excessively on the form of the screenplay and writes it down, it ends up becoming "literary" word, and we are deceived by such a word" (Kinugasa 73). He continues, about the opening sequence:

For example, in the first scene of *A Page of Madness*, the one in the mental

hospital during the night and the heavy rain, the notes read “heavy rain, downpour” [...] Then we place the notes in front of our eyes repeatedly, and think of the screen. Or, better, we *wait* for the image to *unfold itself*. [...] It is not uncommon that scenes written on a simple way on the notes will gradually swell up [*fukureagaru*] as image [*eizō*]. (Kinugasa 73, my emphasis)

In a brief commentary, Kinugasa sketches a system in which the visual filmic image—the one that moves—is a living force of truth latent in the deceiving written image (*imēji*), waiting to be discovered and revealed.<sup>41</sup> It is as if the filmic image would move as a living being that can “swell up”—and, as a living and moving entity, any stillness would harbor the potentiality for movement. Transforming the deceiving dead verbal *imēji* into the living filmic *eizō*, what takes place in his system would be a gradual process enabled by the camera, but necessarily mediated by the waiting of the spectator. Kinugasa thus implies that the filmic vitality would need a state of *waiting*: it is a promise (or a trap, if we follow Peixoto’s words) of potential movement.

#### *What Time Is Movement?*

The fascination of both Kinugasa’s and Peixoto’s films with their very being films reveals, ultimately, a fascination with an autonomous movement that does not require actual movement to be felt. In different ways, they both strive to give visibility to movement as engendered by the filmic machine—be it either through the mobility

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<sup>41</sup> The distinction between the word *imēji* and *eizō* corresponds to the different type of mediation of the visual phenomenon. While first one, written in the *kana* phonetic script, corresponds to any type of visual image, the second one is used for the technically produced image of film and photography. To read more about the historicity of this distinction, see Yuriko Furuhashi’s *Cinema of Actuality*, 2013.

of the camera; or be it within the image, through the manipulations of montage and film exposure—which makes it precisely a *mechanical* movement, generated by the technological mediation. From the evoked image (*imēji*) to the technical image (*eizō*), what happens is the emergence of movement, engendered in the machine but produced by the screen-mediated perception. The production of filmic vitality—the movement that emerges once the still photogram is animated by the projector—is not under the control of the subject: as Kinugasa hinted at, *waiting* constitutes the liminal temporality that animates the films themselves.

Vivian Sobchack argues that film “*has being* in the sense that it *behaves*. A still photograph, however, does not behave; rather, it waits—as a vacancy—for us to possess it” (Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* 61). This quote encapsulates much of the phenomenological debate around media ontology and filmic movement. It describes photography's ambiguous relation with time as a type of waiting, a denial of the living experience. In this sense, the “living” quality of film would be its capacity for movement, which would be directly related to life: one moves because one is a body, which is finite, situated, and limited. In a binary view—according to which photography is that which film is *not*—photography would be the opposite of life for its lack of movement. Because a still photography does not move, it would thus stand outside lived time in its “compelling emptiness,” which Sobchack sees as a desire for infinitude (Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* 58). In this sense, the phenomenological argument would claim that photography, as a *waiting* to be acted upon, would strive for an escape from time, while filmic duration would represent a full embracing of the temporal becoming of the present. Movement, in this sense, would represent the

visibility and the experience of the present, the non-waiting.

But waiting is transitive and interstitial, a liminal state in which one acts on *and* is acted upon by one's desire—one waits for something to (maybe) arrive. It requires a bodily engagement. It is a relation with time as potentiality that requires the experience of its unfolding in the present. Just as waiting is *not* out of time—rather the opposite, it is an acute experience of time—filmic movement cannot be purified from photographic stasis. It is temporally and technologically impure. Although the photographic is usually thought of as the static interruption of movement, the filmic photogram inhabits a temporal conundrum, revealing stillness neither before nor after movement, but indiscernible from it.<sup>42</sup> The photogram, which Gilles Deleuze has called the “*genetic element* of all possible perception,” since it is “inseparable from the series which makes it vibrate,” harbors not only the possibility of movement—the potentiality of moving—but it is an integral part of it: its condition of possibility of movement and of its perception itself (Deleuze, *Cinema I: the movement-image* 83). The photogram would be an image of *change* instead of fixity. It reveals stasis as inherent to the technology of film, turning to the unanswerable question that defines (filmic) vitalism on its head: the search for ‘where movement starts,’ which implies *separation* and *control* of origins stops making sense. The matter is more about the temporality of the arrival of the body of the observer into the perceptual scene.

As previously noted, this intermedial tension appears in different, but

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<sup>42</sup> Besides film-phenomenological approaches such as Sobchack's, other canonical photography theory works such as Roland Barthes's will also cling on to the temporal difference of the two media in the same terms. See Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, 2010.

structural, ways in both Kinugasa's and Peixoto's films. Being objects fascinated with themselves, the films think their own materiality and mediation. Their central concern is the exploration of the filmic body and the limits of the visibility of movement: the desire to see the liminal space between stillness and movement is what builds their very apparatuses of visibility. Either through the clash between the long static poses held by the bodies and the camera, and the irruptions of repetitive camera movement in *Limite*; or in the fast-paced montage and visual distortions in front of the incongruous gestures of the bodies—apathetic, repetitive, violent—in *A Page of Madness*, the threshold between stasis and movement is felt as a probing into the medium, as if to make movement (and time) visible required the visualization of the moment of its emergence. But if the verbal is eliminated in the pursue of the purely cinematic, the photographic is always there as a haunting presence that intrudes in the moving image, imposing restriction onto the drive for a total control and definition of the moving.

Kinugasa attributes his film's "relatively correct" depiction of madness to the guided visit he undertook to the Matsuzawa Mental Hospital, in Tokyo's Setagaya district. Highlighting the impact that the mentally ill had on him, Kinugasa narrates his encounter with patients of the hospital, a space of modern confinement characteristic of late Meiji-early Taishō, as the moment when he realized the high dramatic element contained in the lives of the mentally ill (*kyōki no hito*): "Having the image of human madness as a backdrop, can't a drama emerge?, I asked to Yokomitsu and Kawabata as I narrated the visit to the hospital, on the same day's night." (Kinugasa 64) Kinugasa was shown around the modern psychiatric hospital by Kure Shūzō, the director of the

institution and one of the central figures in the modernization of the medical and legal discourse on madness in Japan. (Abel 85)



Figure 18: the psychiatric hospital in the film.

In Yomota Inuhiko's words, "At the basis [of Kinugasa's idea of filming madness] was his enthusiasm with re-creating as faithfully as possible, in film, the gestures and behaviors of the mad, their spasmodic discontinuous movement, presenting it to the audience's scopophilic desire." (226) Yomota reads a political assessment of modern confinement in the "realistic depiction of madness" achieved by such a physical encounter, later translated into moving image. For him, the film stands out among its avant-garde peers exactly due to its, so to say, ethnographic drive and realistic depiction. A drive whose fulfilment is achieved by the distinctive "spasmodic discontinuous movement" of the bodies. The affinity between the moving medium and the moving body suggested a mutual attraction between the two, making the ill body on film a suitable technological spectacle of the medium's capacity to capture and



display movement.

The movie presents us to a sort of catalogue of madness, evoking Albert Londe's photographs of the hysterics that Jean-Martin Charcot would collect during his initial investigations in the Salpêtrière hospital, published in the volumes of the *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1878-1880). These images help understand what is at stake in Kinugasa's film. Charcot, who was Freud's mentor and the "discoverer of hysteria," used to orchestrate weekly voyeuristic spectacles centered around those squirming female bodies, which Londe would photograph. As Georges Didi-Huberman puts it, hysteria was born out of a performative spectacle that orchestrated an "event of signifiers" (Didi-Huberman 3). In Charcot's catalogues, what one can see is an organization of the photographs according to the retrospective inscription of emotions signified by those female faces and bodies: repugnance, melancholy, passion, etc. In Kinugasa's film, the same drive that moved Charcot seems to be present in the myriad faces of madness we are shown (Figures 19–22).

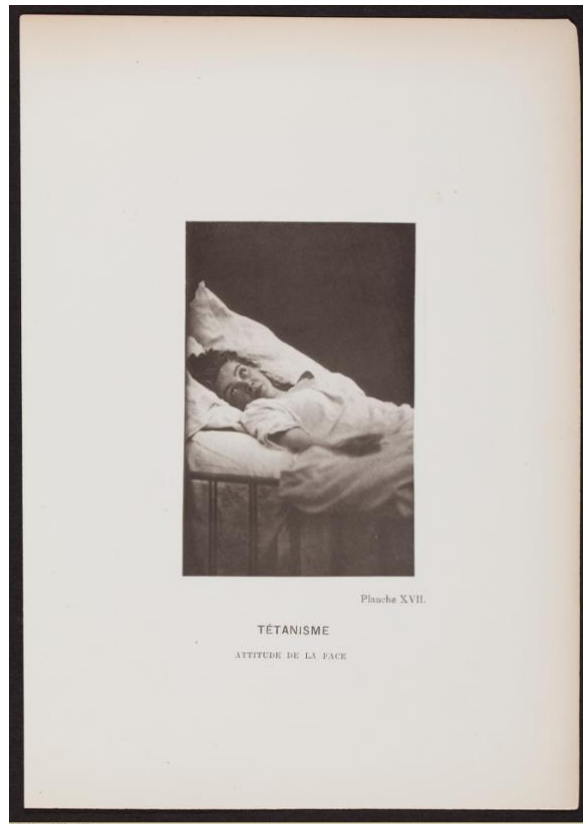


Figure 19: “Attitude of the Face.” *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, plaque XXIII.

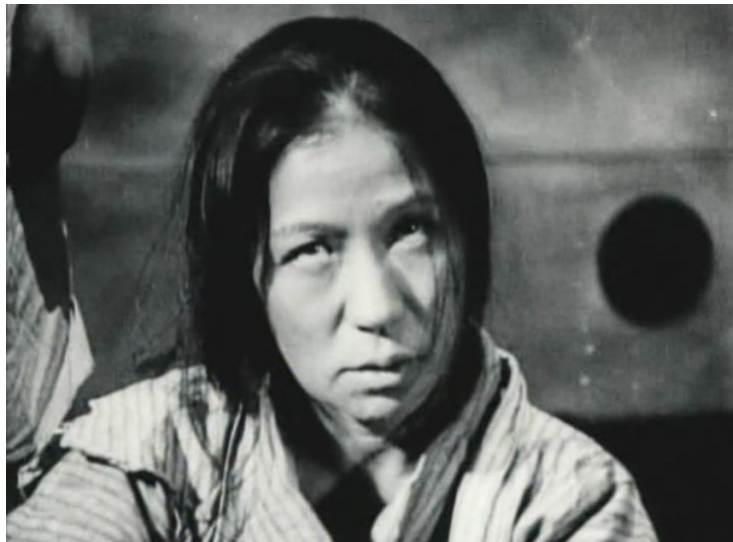


Figure 20: Still from *A Page of Madness*.

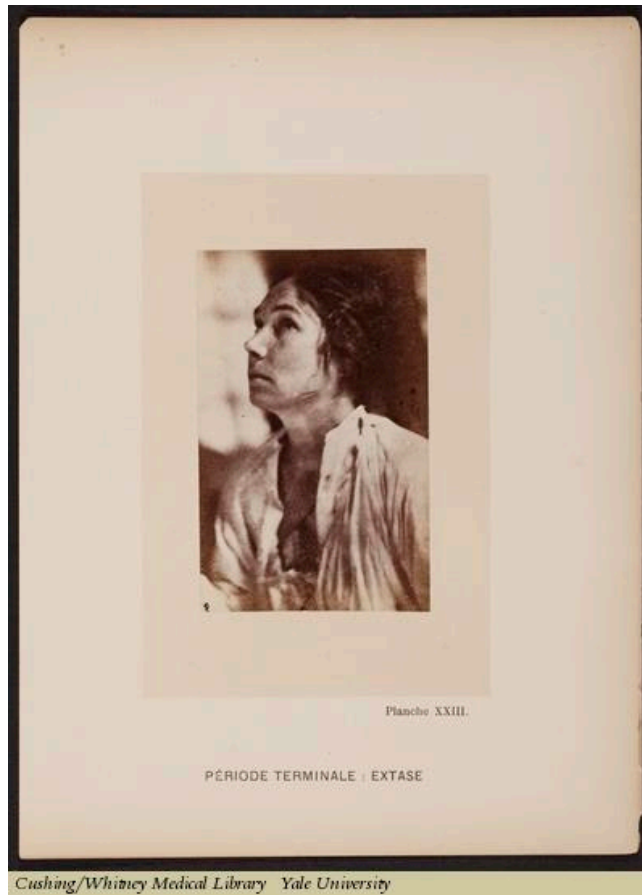


Figure 21: “Terminal Period: Ecstasis.” *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, plaque XXIII.



Figure 22: Still from *A Page of Madness*.

If, in “the period of innocence” of psychoanalysis, as Joan Copjec names it, “images could be plucked from thoughts, symptoms from bodies, meanings from dreams” (Copjec 298) precisely because of the photographic logic, in which the lines were clearly drawn: “the analysand is on one side with images, the analyst is on the other with thoughts” (Copjec 197). Rendering madness visible on the body was possible only insofar as the border was stable: the hysterics inside of their bodies-images, the “sane” inside of their observer-minds. The idea of spectatorship as an intellectual and distant activity informed the first step to regulate female subjectivity by photographic mediation.

However, as Zoe Beloff calls attention, the drive to fixate mental states in photography present in Charcot was played out in a field of *tensions* produced by the medium: “Hysteria was primarily an illness that manifested itself through performance, through *motion*, whether it was uncontrollable jerking and twitching of the body, crippling partial paralysis that caused distortions of movement, or delirium and all kinds of unruly acting out” (Beloff 229). The physical performance of hysteria pushed the limits of the photographic medium precisely because its defining aspect—movement—needed to be halted in a pose for a technology that required long exposure. The limits of the medium opened a zone of tension between the medicalized female body under the scrutiny of science, and the submission of the image technology to those bodies, which would lead to the risk of loss of “truth” in their gestural performance.

The need to make movement visible was a demand that suited well the desire for a purified perception central to *A Page of Madness*—just as the control over the

subaltern body it implied. Kinugasa's film, as the first and only production of the “New Perception Film League” (*Shinkankaku Eiga Renmei*), represented the opportunity to test the modernist immediate perception desired by the group, using the female body to expunge photographic stillness from film. Unlike in the photographic experience of the Salpêtrière, Kinugasa's movie fundamentally avoids the stillness of the photograph, making use of madness as a perceptual technology to explore filmic perception.

However, in Kinugasa's film once we step into the rush towards this pure (visual) sensation, the images become “illegible”, as if the drive for full transparent visibility enabled by the medium would find its obstacle in the very temporality of vision. It reveals vision as an inescapably embodied sense, which requires time and is always “in delay.” The moving images—deemed “pure” movement—resulting from the speedy viscosity of the film not only blocks the visibility and the control over the impure female bodies, but it also turns the film into an experiment, in Gertrude Koch's terms, that addresses and affects the spectator in her bodily senses. If the experimental aspect of the film—that of exploring its own technical materiality—is constantly on the verge of dismantling its narrative layer, it is because by stressing “perception over what is perceived,” as Aaron Gerow puts it, the film is confronted within the inescapable fact that perception exists in the time of the body, irreducible to immediatism and totalization (Gerow, *A Page of Madness* 81). The “difference between body and affect,” described by Koch as the effect of any experiment lies precisely in the temporal gap that constitutes perception. The “ethnographic” desire to frame the female body under the avant-garde desire for a disembodied and pure

visuality ends up in failure precisely due to the fact and thickness of embodied mediation. The striking similarities between the images (Figures 19–22) reveal a deeper connection between the two media in their incapacity to capture movement if not by performance (it is worth to keep in mind that the film's images are made clear here by the extraction of their frame, their poses).

The temporality of perception also becomes a problem in Peixoto's film. Emphasizing rhythm over narration, Mário Peixoto's *Limite* centers its aesthetic organization around a problematic relation to photographic stasis, in order to produce a feeling of temporal suspension. In order to “exit time,” as critic Saulo Pereira de Mello puts it, Peixoto's film lengthen the gaze towards its objects, stretching the photogram and producing an overwhelming experience of the temporal duration of the image (Mello 40). If Kinugasa's film was overall excessively fast, performing movement to the limits of visibility, Peixoto's is overall excessively slow. Under the same project of achieving the “purely cinematic,” it invests its images with an arrest reminiscent of photography, occasionally interrupted by sudden outbursts of fast repetitive mobile shots. Peixoto's film could be read as an obsessive quest for the moment of the emergence of movement, built as an aesthetic apparatus that grants visibility to the moving by contrast to the non-moving. Showing us a man and two women drifting on a lost boat in the open sea, through its long takes of the boat, it turns the openness of the vast nature into a locus of a feeling of timeless entrapment.

As Peixoto has narrated, the idea of *Limite* came from a photograph taken by André Kertész that he saw on the cover of a modernist magazine called *Vu*, when he was in Paris (Mello 40). The photograph, showing a woman's face behind the

handcuffed hands of man, was on the cover of *Vu* no.74, 14 August 1929, and made its way into the film as its first and last images (Figures 24–25). Again, a photograph of female incarceration, immobilized in captivity. Showing us those three bodies in the boat, intercalated with flashbacks of their previous stories in a very tenuous narrative thread, we get to know that one of the women escaped from prison to be again entrapped in a tedious job by a sewing machine; the other woman leaves her alcoholic lover and wanders through deserted landscapes; and the man had lost his female lover to leprosy. The threat of destruction, constantly latent throughout the film, and which culminates with the destruction of the three by the sea, in the end, is conveyed by sustained long shots of parts of their bodies, objects and natural elements.



Figure 24: André Kertész's photograph on the cover of *Vu*, 14 August 1929.



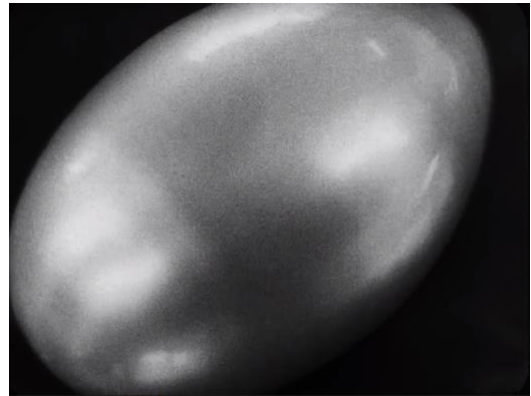
Figure 25: Still from opening of *Limite*.

The film works as a close observation of the material world as if trying to render its movement bare. It seems contradictory that stillness is so prevalent as a general aspect of the film's visual construction. Through long-held close-ups, the camera either freezes the bodies, or chops them up and gives us only their parts. At other times, it presents us an inventory of things, through a slow scrutiny of objects, trees, and rocks, in an inversion of the usual anthropomorphic medium of narrative cinema, as if the temporality of the image itself would be trapping bodies and things in their poses. Peixoto himself described it as "movement frozen in the air," in which the bodies and the objects seem to be trapped in stillness, just as the characters are trapped in the boat.





Figures 26 and 27: Isolated movement.



Figures 28 and 29: Isolated movement.

Rejecting classical-narrative conventions of identification, the film does not lead the spectator to occupy the place of any character, but rather it pushes the viewer to a fascination with the possibilities of filmic perception, produced by these rigidly framed shots, in which movement is seen in isolation from non-movement, as if purified from the rest of the image: a ray of light on a surface, the subtle shaking of the tip of a newspaper page, a lock of a hair on a static head (Figures 26–29, above). On the other hand, these shots are interrupted by abrupt camera movements that dislocate the frame at increasingly changing pace, making seeing impossible (Figures 30–31, below) The

film builds a constant separation between movement and non-movement, within and without the frame. Instead of the scopophilic logic of narrative cinema, it does not operate on the desire to see more, but rather on the desire to see less, in a “pure” and timeless visibility. As critic José Carlos Avellar says that the film “causes us to see less and less well,” conveying the message that “cinema, the film suggests, makes the visible invisible” (Avellar 18). But, despite desired as an object of a disembodied visuality, it nonetheless conveys such a “purified” perception as waiting and repetition, an obsession that keeps returning—the “trap” of a universal cinema, as Peixoto himself had put it. As Kuniichi Uno reminds us, the photographic frame in combination with cinematic movement and duration reshapes ceaselessly what one *cannot see*, what is lying outside of the visible space of the screen. It constantly produces invisibility. Getting closer results in pushing the object away.



Figure 30: outburst of camera movement



Figure 31: outburst of camera movement

If, as Vivian Sobchack claims, the “anatomy and physiology of the film” (*Address of the Eye* 171) necessarily reminds the spectators of their own restricted existence, the experiment architected by Peixoto performs its failure as ontological: desiring a totality of being, its temporal apparatus seem to show that “being is *not being*,” no transcendental communion is possible. In its exploration of the image, the enduring gaze works through what Rei Terada has read as a mode of engagement she terms the “phenomenophilia” of looking away, exemplified by the fixating of one’s gaze over minor physical phenomena. In her words, “Phenomenophilia is looking away at the colored shadow on the wall, or keeping the head turned to the angle at which the sunspot stays in view.” (Terada 4) It becomes the other to the Kantian aesthetic community—*sensus communis*—because, like the filmic duration, it is bound end. It performs perception as the embodiment of temporal *difference*. Terada thus defines the

ethical and political implications of such phenomenological fascination: “Unlike straightforward derogations of the given world that believers in *an-other* reality feel free to express, phenomenophilic dissatisfaction insinuates a reservation it never articulates” (Terada 24). It would work, ultimately, in favor of a displacement of dissatisfaction that, she suggests, “raises questions of queer desire” (Terada 24). Indeed, there are readings of Peixoto’s work as a queer melancholy object.<sup>43</sup> But I suggest here that the very process of its fossilization within its “original” avant-garde attachment to a pure, disembodied, and transcendental timeless visuality strives to un-queer what the very temporality of perception resists. Its queerness and embrace of phenomenality emerge from the very failure of its endeavor. The political task is matter of a queer reading of the apparatus beyond what the layers of fossilization have fixated under its avant-garde universalist discourse.

*Limite* was informed and embraced by the filmic theories of Octávio de Faria and the theorists of the Rio de Janeiro’s Chaplin Club. Its rejection of classical-narrative elements goes along with from their interest in a universalist mode of cinema, which would produce a visual experience that transcends the physicality of one’s body and location towards a total vitality, best represented by Faria’s own writings. Faria, the biggest enthusiast of Peixoto’s film, would even dream with what he termed “absolute visuality”: a film with no cuts, which would flow seamlessly, avoiding the need to adjust one’s sight along cuts between shots, evading the fact that

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<sup>43</sup> Bruce Williams, for example, has read in the film’s visual relation to the female body an index of Peixoto’s queerness. See Bruce Williams, “Straight from Brazil? National and Sexual Disavowal in Mário Peixoto’s *Limite*,” *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 38 n.1, 2001.

one has a body, delimited by space and time, in favor a transcendental aesthetic experience.<sup>44</sup> Phenomenophilic fascination, enhanced by filmic mediation since it is attached to an ephemeral object, would open up a an experimental space between body and affect, or in Terada's words, "the space before the acceptance of any perceived fact," that reveals the impossibility of such a universalist transcendental project into question (Terada 5).

### *The Masochistic Spectator*

If Kinugasa's fast images evince the delay in the spectator's perception, Peixoto's slow images evince the delay in the apparatus to fulfil the spectator's desire for movement. In both cases, the non-convergence between body and image reveals a temporality of perception that is never immediate or under control. Their promises of universality are constantly frustrated. It is possible to say that, differently in each case, what is produced is a "masochistic spectator" that somehow takes pleasure in the suspended time of a promise—which is, indeed, a way the modern filmic spectator has been described by people such as Siegfried Kracauer.

As Deleuze reminds us, "Waiting and suspense are essential characteristics of the masochistic experience. (...) The masochist is morose: but his moroseness should be related to the experience of waiting and delay" (Deleuze, *Masochism* 70). Both films, it is possible to say, work masochistically around fetish-objects embodied by themselves—or rather, the type of vision that they promise but never deliver. Deleuze's radical reading of Freud and Masoch, claims that, unlike the sadist, who

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<sup>44</sup> For a detailed reading of Faria's theory, see chapter 1.

negates the world and violates the fetish, in masochism the political/ethical function is that of displacing the subject. It is a dialectical modulation between stillness and movement that inflicts the pain of waiting onto one's body. The structure of the masochistic frustration appears as the very structure of filmic perception as performed by Kinugasa's and Peixoto's works—embodied, disjunctive, and open-ended—producing a dislocation of difference with the sudden suspension of naturalized perception.

By working around structures of frustration, as “cluster of promises,” the political side-effects brought about by both “fossils of the avant-garde” might be to bring the modernist will to the forefront of their experiment as a failure through embodied perception. Less as an evidence of the trauma of the encounter with the “West,” as argued by William Gardner in relation to *A Page of Madness*, or a plain desire to become European, as suggests Bruce Williams about *Limite*, they reveal, in spite of their own authorial and political-aesthetic projects, the avant-garde universalist will as impossible, dislocating vision onto the temporality of the body.<sup>45</sup> Their process of fossilization—the repetitive return to their bodies and mythologies—only re-enacts the gap of frustration that they perform in their very temporal unfoldings.

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<sup>45</sup> See William Gardner, “New Perceptions: Kinugasa Teinosuke's Films and Japanese Modernism,” *Cinema Journal*, vol. XLIII, no. 3, 2004; Bruce Williams, “Straight from Brazil? National and Sexual Disavowal in Mário Peixoto's ‘Limitel’” *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2001.

### CHAPTER 3: LIVING FOLDS: MURAYAMA TOMOYOSHI'S VARIATION ON THE VISIBLE

#### *Murayama Tomoyoshi's Images* <sup>46</sup>

In the mid-1920s, Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs wrote that “an image speaks only for itself.” (21) *Only*, and not for anything else. Somewhat similarly to Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's film theory,<sup>47</sup> for Balázs, the defining characteristic of the filmic image is that there is “nothing 'behind' the image surface, and no 'hidden' meaning” (20). In his search for a filmic specificity, he emphasized the absence of meaning, the particular nature of texture and surface that composes a filmic image, its coming into being *through* and *in* time and movement. But, nonetheless, Balázs remarks that film has an atmosphere of “vitality,” its images can become a “flood of details of material life” (22).

It is precisely this *lessened* aspect of the image that will be central to this chapter, the zone of indeterminacy, the gap it opens up as a space for change or doubt, at the moment of the encounter between image and subject, the *fold* that confounds exteriority with interiority, material conditions and aesthetic experience. The vitality of the filmic image is a peculiar one, different from the concept of a transcendental life, as defended by Octávio de Faria: it presents us details of material life through nothing but a flow of surfaces, of light and shadow, as Tanizaki Jun'ichirō

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<sup>46</sup> The figures in this chapter are reproduction of *Hanzai Kagaku*, vol. 13, December 1931, as reprinted in Horino Masao, *Maboroshi no Modanisuto: Shashinka Horino Masao no Sekai*, 2012.

<sup>47</sup> See chapter one.

suggested.<sup>48</sup> In Balázs's words: "film is a *surface* art, whatever is inside is outside" (19). What to do with such a fleeting object? "In front of each image, what we should ask is how it gazes (us), how it thinks (us), and how it touches (us), all at once," says image advocate Georges Didi-Huberman ("Cómo Abrir los Ojos" 14).<sup>49</sup> An image, establishing this zone of relation, installs a time of negotiation in which all terms involved are bound to be dislocated. This chapter will address precisely the encounter with this fundamental absence, or disrupted presence, of the technical image—still and moving—to think ways in which it can suggest a different openness to history, a non-sovereign political place of the subject, and a specific mode of perceptual engagement with the world. This basic paradoxical fold, in which the materiality of the image encounters the ephemerality of an experience, will serve here as the point of tension and undoing that unfolds in multiple ways onto politics, history, and theory.

The subject in case, here, is the Japanese multimedia artist Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901-1977), whose work in theory and image in the 1920s and 1930s undergoes a significant, albeit subtle, shift alongside the ongoing historical and political space surrounding him. But Murayama, for whom the defining aspect of art was its politicality, its capacity to act upon and change the world, had a problem with cinema. For him, film could never fulfill art's political task. Why does Murayama dislike so much the moving image? But why can't he stop writing, thinking, making it?

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<sup>48</sup> See chapter one for a closer look into Octávio de Faria and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's ontologies of the filmic image.

<sup>49</sup> Translation from Spanish by me.



The idea here will be to follow the conflicts that arise within Murayama's own avant-garde program by a certain experience of fascination and attraction that the filmic image caused, but neither in order to form a statement on the history of the avant-garde or even on Murayama's body of work. Rather, through reading the points of conflict and tension, I will address the nuances and contradictions that the filmic image brings into the modes of engagement between subject, body, and history, which suggest a different relation between the political and the aesthetic experience. In this chapter, the media theorist Vilém Flusser is summoned to the dialogue because he was one of the first to theorize the technologically produced image as an aesthetic object that instills *doubt* and disturbs the linearity of history through its materiality, an effect seen in the trajectory of Murayama's own relation with film.

Murayama, like his non-Euro-North-American avant-garde peers, spent a formative period in Europe, more specifically Germany, where he had gone as a theology student in 1922. Growing up Catholic, then turned into an atheist, he gave up his university studies to engage with the avant-garde world that was bustling in recently formed Weimar Germany. In his one-year period in Berlin he starts his engagement with the visual arts as a painter, taking part in collective exhibitions in Europe which provided him with the opportunity to encounter artists such as Marinetti, Kandinsky, Georg Grozs, and partaking in the aesthetic discourse of the avant-garde. Also, importantly, it is during his period in Germany that Murayama confronts the material aspect of modernity: the decaying urban environment, the poverty of post-war Germany, the strong labor movement (soon to be smashed), and

the experience of his own racial difference in a predominantly white environment.<sup>50</sup> His interest in what he saw as the fate of modernity—its decay, which would give space for the new—was intertwined with a fascination for new media and new modes of aesthetic expression.

From his first major theoretical work, in which he coined the term *conscious constructivism* [*ishikiteki kōseishugi*], through his work with the Dadaist group Mavo, his engagement with social realism in the proletarian arts movement, and his works and essays on film and photography, it is possible to see a conflict between an idea of the self-determined engaged political subject—a model for the political itself—ideas of distance, and the geopolitical historical timeline of modernity. Murayama, here, will be read through the tensions that arise at the encounter between film and his political-aesthetic program, which reflect and evince the problems of an imagined self-image of the avant-garde. Through Murayama's thought on film, this image emerges as contingent upon specific ways of understanding the relation between aesthetic experience, geopolitical distance, and political expressivity, which the encounter with the filmic image seems to trouble. Can an image—or a screen—call for a new ontology that resists the theoretical model that tries to frame it? What are the implications of this shift, what does it entail? Thinking with Murayama and the filmic machine, I will show how some terms—such as history, image, and political agency—get dislocated once the idea of movement is transformed within the experience of film.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See Murayama Tomoyoshi. *Engekiteki Jijoden*. Tokyo: Tōhō Shuppansha, 1971.

<sup>51</sup> The “film experience” has been conceptualized in different ways, from

To think this, I will activate different constellations that will help ground and move a process of dislocation that I read in Murayama, focusing on the gradual unfolding of different notions of agency, split between life and nonlife (image, technology): a politics of restriction emerging through the encounter with film, which is theorized by Murayama as  $\Omega$ a technology of absence. Reading Murayama against the grain, focusing on the moments in which his scheme is disrupted, or when his body is addressed against his own will, I will see how a zone of ontological dispute through the image acquires a different aesthetic-political role.

My interest here is to see how the encounter with the technical image, for Murayama, opens a different horizon of speculation, one that deals with the future as potentiality for the unknown, rather than the actualization of the expected. If Murayama's thought firstly echoed the Hegelian metaphysics according to which history is "a continuous concretization of the abstract, an approximation to a paradigmatic purity which appears as both sense and direction of the process," in the words of Laclau and Mouffe (15), seeing as a spectator of the moving image troubles his theoretical scheme to a point of conflict, opening the possibility of a counter-reading to a different politics.

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psychoanalysis to phenomenology. Vivian Sobchack, for example, defines it as a process of individuation through vision, in which we "take possession of our vision and make it visible." ("The Address of the Eye" 54) Sobchack's recasting of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology sees the film experience as the moment of awareness of one's becoming though the embodied phenomenon of vision. This claim will reverberate more in the next chapter's discussion of Mário de Andrade, but here what I am calling the "experience of film" is, for now, the situation of an immobile body engaged in seeing moving/mobile images unfold in time.

*All of life: historicism, avant-garde, and totality*

Murayama Tomoyoshi's prominent role in the formation of the avant-garde environment in Japan is long and complicated, and will not be the main object of consideration here.<sup>52</sup> His vast body of work—in theory and practice—spans almost all possible media, from his early paintings, through sculpture, installation, performance, theater (as a set designer, costume designer, playwright, and director), to architecture, photography, and film. First associated with the post-dadaist anarchist group Mavo, in the mid-1920s, by the late 1920s to the early 1930s he became one of the most important names in the Marxist proletarian arts movement—concentrating much of his efforts in the theatrical activity of the experimental Tsukiji Little Theater and becoming a notorious theater person, but also participating actively in publications and projects of the Proletarian Film League (Prokino). Murayama was also a translator of avant-garde aesthetic theory and literature of people such as Wassily Kandinsky and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, was part of the first stagings of Expressionist theater in Japan, and was an emphatic defender of an intermedia approach to art, engaging with experiments in the theater-film mixed performance called *rensageki*.<sup>53</sup>

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52 Good sources of in-depth historical information on his relation to the avant-garde groups are Gennifer Weisenfeld's *Mavo : Japanese Artists and the Avant-garde, 1905-1931*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002; Omuka Toshiharu's *Nihon no Avagyarudo Geijutsu: Mavo to Sono Jidai*. Tokyo: Seidosha, 2001; Iwamoto Kenji's *Murayama Tomoyoshi, Gekiteki Sentan*. Tokyo: Shinwasha, 2012; Peter Eckersall's "From Liminality to Ideology: the politics of embodiment in prewar avant-garde theater in Japan." Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006.

53 On his writings and works on *rensageki*, see Lee Jungwook's "Murayama Tomoyoshi ni okeru 'engeki' to 'eizō' no tsūgō'," 2012; and Diane Wei Lewis's, "

After several times arrested in the 1930s during the rise of state persecution of communists under the Peace Preservation Law, Murayama publicly recanted his political engagements in 1934 but continued his activities in the theater, while publishing as a critic and theorist on film, photography, and visual arts. Although vastly discussed in the context of modern theater studies and visual arts, his interest in the technical images of film and photography is hardly ever mentioned, not only because it was marginal to his own self-narrative, but also because it destabilized his own aesthetic-political program--one that centered around the rejection of representation, the critique of the position of the spectator, and the importance of the physical presence of body and objects.

Murayama's work begins in his year in Weimar Berlin (1922-1923), marked by his encounter with two narratives of historical time: the decaying historical present of post-World War I Germany, with an increasingly impoverished population and an urban landscape turned into ruins; and the disruptive future imaginations of the avant-garde through formal experimentations. In March 1923, he publishes one of his early and main pieces on aesthetic theory and history, "Beyond Expressionism" (*Sugiyuku Hyōgenha*), and shortly after, along with a group of artists, he founds the Mavo collective, which directly followed the ideas contained in his text, self-declared as a "negative entity," the newest thing among all avant-gardes. (Weisenfeld 66) His image, alongside Mavo, is seen as central for the period, what Takizawa Kyōji calls a "magnetic field" for the whole avant-garde discourses and practices in Japan (85).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> All Takizawa Kyōji and Murayama Tomoyoshi's quotation are my translations from Japanese.

As Nicole Brenez (2006) notices, the term “avant-garde” creates a spatialized image. From its militaristic origin (the avant-garde were the leaders of the infantry in medieval France), to its artistic connotations, to its use in revolutionary politics, the term usually implies an advancement through unknown territory, either discovering or producing that which is advanced through, ahead in time and space—and in time as space:

As a counter-attack, as assault against the world, it [the avant-garde's] work consists, in effect, of developing the forms, practical and theoretical, of refusing domination and submission to the established order. But on the affirmative side of its proposition, the work consists on deploying ideas, forms, without worrying about what was already there, to confront the unknown, the unthinkable, the inadmissible.” (10-11) <sup>55</sup>

The idea of avant-garde, and the historical-political role of art and aesthetics, for Murayama, was caught in the paradox of what writer and theorist Octavio Paz called the modern “tradition of rupture” (*la tradición de la ruptura*): the future becomes the new point of origin, with, as noticed Peter Bürger, the constant absorption of disruptive practices by the market, an aspect that Murayama himself notices during his stay in Berlin.<sup>56</sup> What is of interest here is less the identity of a movement, but rather the fact that the avant-garde as a concept needs the spatialization of a forward-moving time, in order to place both subjectivity and form as agents in the

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55 Brenez's quotations are my translations from French.

56 Octavio Paz. *Los Hijos del Limo*, 1981. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, 1984. Murayama, *Engekiteki Jijoden*, 1972, pp. 22-23.

production of a future that can be completed in its distinction from the present. The speculative character of the discourse of the avant-garde that Brenez sees is not so speculative, and, in the peripheral spaces to the so-called “West,” it is based on a certain denial of the present evidenced by the anxiety of not being “fully modern” or mere “receivers” of modernity, as Murayama expresses in many of his texts. It does not move away from Hegelian historicism.

To understand the double movement that granted aesthetic form with a historical task, I shall turn to Murayama's idea of both form and history contained in his 1923 text “Beyond Expressionism,” the theoretical essay that introduces his concept of “conscious constructivism” [*ishikiteki kōseishugi*]. The text opens with a statement: “It seems that, in its original German soil, Expressionism has reached its full realization” (145). He pays attention to the process by which, just like Impressionism, Expressionism by that time would have already become the normalized mode of conceptualizing art, what he calls its absorption into “mannerism” and “lack of consciousness” [*manerizumu, muishiki*], reading in art history a confirmation of an inevitable timeline.

His art historical timeline sees the entrance of subjectivity into the sphere of art, and the gradual disappearance of the object of art itself, dissolved into general life: “That is to say, the object of the plastic arts is on the process of disappearing. Then, not a simple primary visual aspect, but something of a complex sense of sight, temporal and spatial, was introduced” (146-7). Following the descriptive statement put forth by the ethos of the avant-garde, according to which “Nowadays, the whole storage room has been used,” in Kandinsky's words, he sees the present as a moment

of exhaustion and intrinsic demand for the new through the destruction of the border between art and life represented by the artistic object.

But now [art's] object has become the entirety of life [*zenjinsei*]. All limits have disappeared. Therefore, the means to express it must also have no limits. Moreover, in the “comfortable world of expression,” for one object there was no more than one means of expression. That is to say, despite some differences, there used to be nothing but imitation [*mosha*]. However, now, to each object, there are limitless possible means of expression. (148)

It is in the question of mediation that Murayama finds one of the flaws of the Expressionist program, one of the reasons for its exhaustion. Using a marked language of totality, if *all* is about life, he asks, how can its mode of transmission go unproblematized? Where does the split happen? He criticizes the fascination with *expressive* forms, and the reliance on “mere” visuality, which would fall short of the task to perform the historical need of art to convey *all*. He asks whether a mode of expression which relies purely on sight could even take up such a comprehensive task. His struggle against form is, fundamentally, a struggle against *distance* and *mediation* itself. The demand of limitlessness points toward a politics of (im)mediation that requires that the thing itself be present to the observer/participant of the life/art, based on an image premised on the possibility of an exhaustible totality, an inextinguishable perceptual territory.

For Murayama, the turning point of the political capacity of modern art (for him, art is art insofar as it is political, that is, when it provokes change in the world),



comes as a culmination of his avant-garde paradigm according to which the artwork needs “not to “express” something, but [to follow] the desire to truly become practical things themselves,” at which point, he claims, the border between constructivist object and architecture is overcome. (Murayama, “Engekiteki Jijoden” 61) The rejection of form would mean the rejection of mediation, seen by Murayama as a necessary condition for the political to enter the aesthetic, hence of art's fulfillment.<sup>57</sup> More importantly, it is a subsumption of all things into a paradigm of action, which he links to *desire* [*yokubō*]: a desire for the object, ultimately a desire for the world understood as a desire for direct tactile contact and movement.

The solution, for Murayama, then lies in the *life* of the body: for him, the movement of history would tend to the dissolution of the boundaries between object, representation, and world, accompanied by a task carried out through a sensorial shift away from occularcentrism. What he calls the “complexification of vision” will mean almost its rejection. Not unlike people such as Benjamin, in the introduction to his translation of Marinetti's essay on “Tactilism” [*Taktilismus*, *Chokkakushugi*], Murayama foresees the historical need for people to explore new senses. He sees in the essay by the Italian Futurist, who would later become a center figure in Mussolini's Fascist Party, an evidence of “how post-WWI Europe has fallen into a dreadful situation, and for that reason people have entered in a distal relation with their own senses.” (Murayama, “Taktilismus” 199) The sensorial shift, a historical task to

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<sup>57</sup> One could read it as a rejection of negativity or, even, of difference itself, especially if we read in it echoes of Hegelian metaphysics. I thank Naoki Sakai for bringing up this relation.

cope with a political-aesthetic condition, is located on a spatialized historical timeline of necessity announcing the future to come: “Such times will also come to Japan.” (“Taktilismus” 200)

Murayama's claim for art is a program for a future, in order to bring to the local present the future that was being lived elsewhere. A future that, albeit unavoidable, could be accelerated by “consciously” embracing art's fate to eliminate distinctions between art and life, representation and object, spectator and image, and the differences among media. It rejects *form* in favor of circulation of “life,” on a circuit of different media in which the subject's desiring body—a desire for the new in the world through the presence of things—would be at the center of a historical-political desire. He writes:

From now on everything, yes, *everything* must be thought, understood, resolved by a new principle. Furthermore, aesthetics [*bigaku*] should be taken from its unauthorized throne and placed anew in a just position. Then, after overthrowing the ridiculous *still* aesthetics [*seiteki bigaku*] created by those who are not artists, a new exquisite *moving* aesthetics [*dōteki bigaku*] should be born. The fate of the plastic arts, philosophy and religious artists, the fate of the six fields of plastic art—painting, sculpture, moving pictures, theater, dance—, the fate of the spectator, *all* should be bound together. (Murayama, “Beyond Expressionism” 193)

Movement, here, entails an action emerging and ending in the body of the spectator, taking place in order to have art and the subject achieve their common fate: to merge with the movement of history, synonymous with an idea of a life that needs to me

mobilized. This “almost fluid and multidimensional sense of corporeality,” which Peter Eckersall describes (desires?) as a way to a “radical Japanese selfhood” that could break the national imperial body, was animated by an intense desire for the political present in an urge to immediacy and an absolute circulation (Eckersall 233). This new totalized territory of life implies that what was at stake is less a formalist issue but rather life itself, and its mediation. The discourse on form is displaced by the centrality that life acquires.

Life, we notice, emerges as overwhelming and overpowering precisely when visual representation is questioned: at the moment when mediation turns into a problem to be overcome, when mimetic representation needs to be thrown away not because, as in Brechtian self-reflexive critical modernism, it represents an illusionist object-like veil over structures of systemic abstraction, but rather because it fails to convey the objects of life themselves. It is not surprising that the question of life and mediation arises when the photographic image also makes its entrance into the discursive field of art, questioning precisely the boundaries between life, image, and aesthetics that Murayama himself embraced as an avant-garde program against the organized system of the art market. With the wider access to photographic cameras, and to amateur small-gauge film cameras, alongside the booming entertainment culture fueled by the film industry and the internationalization of capital—with increased Hollywood commercial films, Japanese films, and avant-garde screenings in Japan—the technical image was all around, and shaped much of the Taishō (1912-

1926) and Early Showa (1926-1989) media ecology, as in any place of the modernizing world.<sup>58</sup>

The relation between physical world and technical image necessarily posed a question to issues of life. The photographic image, after all, at first glance, brings the promise of transmitting life as it is through an “unmediated” and objective technical method that could bring the world to one's hands—the “pencil of nature,” as William Henry Fox Talbot had named it in 1844-46. Moreover, the technical image, after all, allows one to see, as Béla Balázs suggested, “the flood of details of life” in a medium that travelled across spaces, making it accessible to one's eyes and hands. It promised the end of distance between objects and subjects, and among spaces—in Thomas Lamarre's (2005) words, “the collapse of geopolitical distance”. This is when, nonetheless, the contradictions, tensions, and different forces working within this politics of life and of the image become evident in Murayama: when his historical narrative of movement and agency encounters a critical moment of restriction and suspension. Here I shall first return to a consideration of different ideas of life, to gradually move to questions of image and history.

*Life as method: the political evasion of the present*

In Murayama's writing, two different notions of life appear—*jinsei*, that is, human life, that which dies; and *seikatsu*, which is material, daily, or even historical

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58 On the use of small-gauge cameras and amateur practices in avant-garde film in Japan see Markus Nornes's *Japanese Documentary Film: the Meiji Era Through Hiroshima*; and, in Japanese, Nishimura Tomohiro's “Amachua Eiga no Avangyarudo” (The Avant-garde of Amateur Film), 2006.

life. Most of the scholarly work on Murayama, on the Mavo group, and on the historical avant-gardes in general, usually conflate both, retaining the idea of life as the second one: a historically determined sphere of daily practices, in which the objects of industrial production, automatization, and consumption invade the private space of life. However, the convergence or co-existence of these two notions needs to be kept unresolved, since, as I will suggest, it is precisely in their tension, difference, and mutual folding onto each other that the aesthetic anxiety exerted by Murayama's own politics of circulation is driven onto a zone of indetermination when life and technical object merge in the technical image.

Working with assemblages and collages, Murayama and his Mavo peers engaged in a process of construction of aesthetic entities in different media—painting, sculpture, architecture—born out of the combination of disparate materials and objects: shoes, boxes, posters, metal scraps, hair, newspaper cutouts. Scholars such as Gennifer Weisenfeld and Takizaka Kyōji have done extensive readings of the relations between the use of objects and what Murayama called “the feeling of life” (*seikatsu kanjō*), as a response to the growing mass culture, industrialization, and commodification of the social environment described by the word *seikatsu*, in 1920s Japan. “The term *seikatsu* appeared frequently in both popular and scholarly publications. It was used so widely in the prewar period that *seikatsu* was often synonymous with the practice of modern life itself, with all its psychological and material implications,” briefly describes Weisenfeld (125).<sup>59</sup> In Murayama's words:

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59 Several works have been done on the emergence of the idea of “cultural life.” (*bunka seikatsu*) or “everyday life,” and its important new temporal, spatial, and

Hair and fabric, being thus far unused physical materials for art making (construction making), it allowed to address not only the sense of sight, but also the sense of touch. Moreover, they are not only merely sensorial materials, but different from paint or wood or concrete, they hold their own intrinsic uses. A fabric can be a handkerchief, a chemise. As for the hair, it is a half-living thing. That is to say, they have their feeling of life (*seikatsu kanjō*), their meaning, which follow their respective intrinsic uses. (*Engekiteki Jijoden* 62)

Murayama would understand the use of actual objects, “as they are”, or rather the post-life of modern capitalist commodities, as a solution for the restriction imposed by the mimetic paradigm and the limitations of the sense of sight: it connected the historical present with an address by the aesthetic object that was both visual, tactile, and subjectively in dialogue with each individualized modern experience encapsulated in the objects. In Murayama's theory, he distinguished it from a practice concerned only with the sensorial dimension of materials, which in his view made his practice different from Constructivists and Dadaists such as El Lissitzky and Kurt Schwitters. He saw those objects as channeling a life inherent in themselves, a historical life that pointed to a certain condition of the present. Takizawa Kyōji suggests that “By using the feeling of life (*seikatsu kanjō*) soaked in the raw material [of the objects] as an

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material implications. Harry Harootunian in *History's Disquiet* (2000) offers an enriching analysis of the issue of modernity in practices and theory, in Japan, but also in other places “peripheral” to the European space. Another work is Miriam Silverberg's *Erotic, Grotesque, Nonsense* (2006), which offers a cultural studies perspective on the Taishō Period's mass culture and its relation to ideas of everyday life.

expressive method, we can even see his principle [of “conscious constructivism”] arising from 'life' as a medium.” (86)

If mediation through formalism and “primary sight” was an obstacle to reach life, the use of objects—a realist and sarcastic embracing of commodity fetishism—seemed to be a way out in the object-equals-life logic: life is made present by its double abstraction on the post-life of the commodity. A vitality of life that would be conveyed through the object's death. The object is already not there, it points towards a ghost from within the system of value production, despite Murayama's own idea of the political informed by an economy of desire based on movement, acceleration, and presence.

Murayama saw materiality and physicality as that which conveys the point of decay of modernity: “in other words, the destruction of the old was seen as a necessary precondition for construction of the new.” (Weisenfeld 125) The destruction of the old and production of the new, in history, was predicated upon a politics of space that aimed at destroying the distance among media, and between spectator and object, but which, ironically, valued whatever in the object was *not* the object's materiality. The object, beyond bringing in the material dimension of the everyday commodified social landscape, was also a node in the circuit of life drives (*jinsei*, life that dies, biological and invisible) that carried the role of a production of history centered around the subject. This appears less in the logics of the actual object, but in the process of *accumulation* and negativity that prevails in Murayama's works, in spite of his seemingly opposite position.

Under the “radical Japanese selfhood” seen by Eckersall there is a temporal paradigm working on several overlapping totalities: history, life, subject. The supposed radicality was based on an identitarian subjectivity that represents a sutured subject who can organize the future of a sutured nation—the political for Murayama, is premised on a sovereign subject who no more than *confirms* a future that, despite its claim for novelty, is *not* actually open to radical change.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have argued that this idea of the political, one that fails to achieve a “renunciation of the category of subject as a unitary, transparent, and sutured entity,” (166) also fails to understand “politics as a practice of creation.” (153) Relying on an imaginary built upon a foundational entity—the historical future—Murayama's ontology of movement as action, and of closeness as presence, ends up relying on what Laclau and Mouffe describe as an “the conviction that the social is sutured at some point, from which it is possible to fix the meaning of any event independently of any articulatory practice,” (177) which denies the precariousness of subject, life, and history, imagining a transcendental founding principle to which all political struggles and changes respond. It is the opposite of an open-ended idea of the political horizon, the constant articulation of a movement that is not movement forward, rather it is contingent upon the specific constellations that are formed within each given circumstance.

Even though Murayama experiences a shift from anarchism to communism, joining the Japanese Communist Party, leaving Mavo's project and engaging in the proletarian art movement, the relation between subject, mediation, and history remains the same: a life, actualized in matter, that is synthesized and pushes a previously set



historical narrative to its point of culmination. The limits of the virtual in life, for Murayama, are set by historical necessity and inevitability.

Although Murayama's thought rejected representational mimesis, it replaced it with a bio-mimesis of history, so to say, since the life stemming from an active desiring subject, in this sense, could produce all. Although "the artist needed "consciously" to manifest the construction or artificiality of the work of art to break through the image of totality," as Weisenfeld argues (45), in Murayama's theory totality is restored on the level of political desire. The idea of political desire here, although in tangential and indirect ways, performs what Ariella Azoulay (2012) calls "the anxiety concerning the disappearance of the political" on the level of the body, seen as an entity that should not gaze but needs to act—activities that are placed in opposed poles. Likewise, action and movement in Murayama's aesthetic economy of political desire are contingent upon *motor transformations*.

But if the political needs to engage with visible action in a motor understanding of movement that presupposes the possibility and constant risk of its opposite, we would always be on the verge of its disappearance once we stop to look. This is what Azoulay terms the third type of aesthetic judgment—which answers the question: is this political or non-political?—which usually assumes that the political is a choice, stemming exclusively from the "active" subject of the artist—and that it can disappear. As she puts it:

When thought regarding the political is bound to the judgment of taste, whether toward historical events or toward the present, then the actualization

of the political becomes something exceptional and rare. The pursuit of the political (“This is political”), as well as sophisticated forms of its negation (“This is not political”), become ends in themselves. (Azoulay, *Civil Imagination* 96)

In Murayama's theory, judgment is formed as follows: in order to be art, it would need to be political; in order to be political, it would need to actualize life as totality. There are three central ideas for the political in art within Murayama's thought: *closeness*, *physicality*, and *movement/action*. *Seeing*, for him, was not enough, because it implied distance, a contemplative inaction. In the need to *destroy* distance between object and spectator, the political art lies on the equivalence of two antitheses, two series of exclusions: action versus sight, body versus eye, since one should avoid *only* seeing.

Aligning with Guy Debord's axiom that says that “the more he contemplates, the less he lives,” for Murayama to be political means to have one's body be affected by other bodies (human and non-human): one could not fall on the passivity of the spectator distant from the world.<sup>60</sup> The problem that organizes Murayama's aesthetic-political program is that of the *distance* between subject and life, when mediated by representation, understood as a twofold issue: the spectator's distance to the world as imposed by its reliance on the sense of sight, doubled in the distance of the local present of Japan in relation to whatever historical modernity could be. For example, writing about Prokino (Proletarian Film League), Murayama states that truly modern

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60 A great discussion on the critical problems of this axiom can be found in Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009). The quote, from Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, can be found cited in Rancière, p.6.

cinema is “a cinema that stands on a new worldview,” “a cinema that is not a slave to the capitalist. A cinema that struggles. A cinema that propagates [*senden suru*]. A cinema that exposes. A cinema that organizes. A cinema that educates.” (Murayama, “Film People and The Modern Taste” 7) Following his program, in order to be modern, film needs to be political: that is, it needs to act as a modern subject.

Not only a question of distance between work and spectator, it was also a matter of media. Against art genres “sadly squirmed in their own forceless fields,” Murayama found the political in art’s capacity to re-construct the sensorial apparatus of the subjects, transposing media and matters: theater, film, photography, painting, architecture. (Murayama, “Photography’s New Function” 232) Praising the multimedia performance format of *rensageki*, which combined stage theater with filmic projection, for him the truly modern and political art form needed to extrapolate the limitations of media. The anxiety over the disappearance of the political entailed a discourse on media supports, human senses, and representational regimes.

#### *The technical image: dislocations*

The series of equivalences that Murayama builds can be thus described: all of life (*zenjinsei*) needs to be accessible to the body through art; this life is actualized in the objects of modern life (*seikatsu*) and made available, on a direct communication, to the senses once they are arranged in a “moving aesthetics” (*dōteki bigaku*) that spurs the desire for life itself. Murayama proposes a closed circuit. And, through this, history can be actualized towards the future. For Murayama, life would emerge with/in movement—and to that extent, the political is the active, and the paradigm of the

visual image, which demands a distant subject to “only” look, would need to be avoided. In this aesthetic-political program, life would be a force of territorialization of the body through objects and media, in which movement should be produced, never halted, and always expanded in spite of the restrictions of matter.

It is a politics of endless desire: against the biopower of the modern State, it would be necessary to always activate a counter biopolitics of perfecting modernity so as to accelerate it. The objects were seen as *traces* of a ruined present and *evidences* of a future to come, placed in an enclosed historical timeline that excludes contingency and difference. But it was another type of object that troubled Murayama's political economy of boundless desire, his equivalence of the political to action, and his definition of life as that which is not distant: the object of the *moving* image of film—or, rather, the impossibility of the moving image to become an object.

Usually left aside as minor or marginal, photography and film occupied an important part of Murayama's thought. The still photographic image is for him a point of political inflection of art for its actuality can grasp the ugly aspects of the material world, releasing it from its beautiful abstraction. Seeing Ernst Friedrich's 1924 *War on War*, the photographs of German military atrocities that Susan Sontag characterized as “photography as shock therapy,”<sup>61</sup> he states that photography introduces politics into aesthetic form through its public politicization of the senses by showing the evidences of failure of modernity. (Murayama, “The Turn Towards Art Photography” 253)

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<sup>61</sup> See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York, 2003), p.13.

In 1930, Murayama directs a photomontage with photographer Horino Masao, titled “Flowing through the capital: Sumida River Album” (*Shutokanryū: Sumidagawa no Arubamu*) published in the journal *Hanzai Kagaku*, in December 1931. There, his idea of the photographic as a tool for capturing the traces of modernity's decay appears clearly, along with his emphasis on movement and circulation. Adding to Horino's recent fascination with Lázló Moholy-Nagy and Marianne Brandt's Bauhaus experimentation with photomontage, Murayama and Horino's work focuses on the river Sumida in Tokyo and the trashes of the city, the visual essay spans several pages, suggesting movement by the sequence of photographs of garbage and working populations along the river. Predominantly grey and with low contrast, the sequence starts and ends with industrial, smokey landscapes along the river (Figures 29–30), closing with a juxtaposition of frames that gives an effect of zooming out (Figure 31). Movement within and among the frames is intercut with writings, opening with the sentence: “while flowing through the metropolis, the river pushes forth its garbage.”

In the photo-sequence, comparable to establishing shots of an opening sequence of a movie, we see buildings, machines, boats, industrial chimneys and waste. Some working bodies, and very few individualized human subjects. The structure of repetition appears at inscriptions such as “waste, waste, waste.” (Figure 30) The desire of movement is made visible by the cartographic sequence that structures a mapping of the city, following the river's flow, and placing the images in an order that is intended to move across the space of the metropolis: a victory of the

spectator over space and time. If the photos show the ruins of modernity, its structure suggest the triumph of the spectator.<sup>62</sup>



Figure 29.  
Reprinted in *Maboroshi no Modanisuto*, 2012, p. 65.



Figure 30. Reprinted in  
*Maboroshi no Modanisuto*,  
2012, p.69.

<sup>62</sup> It is worth to note that the iconography of waste, urban decay, or abjection is present in early works of photography, avant-garde or not, in several parts of the world—as Murayama himself notes. I thank Amy Villarejo for pointing this out. Here, instead, I focus on precisely what is *not* only the iconography per se, but what in Murayama appears as a search for the conquest of a particular space, which reveals a specific demand of movement.

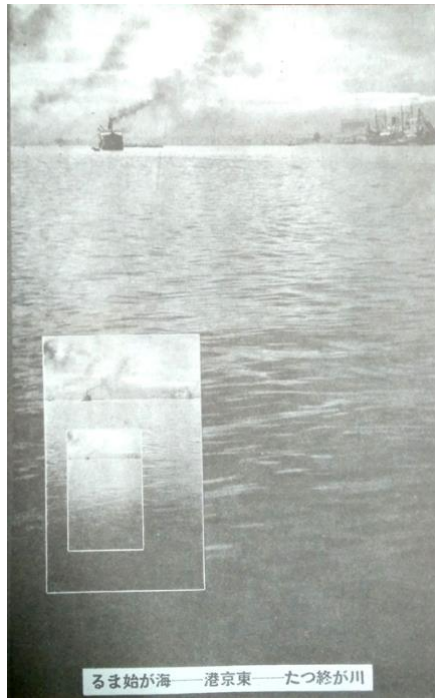


Figure 31.  
Reprinted in *Maboroshi no  
Modanisuto*, 2012, p.82

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the idea of a “machine vision”, or “camera eye,” was usually celebrated, in Japan and elsewhere, as a way of delivering a more accurate non-subjective representation of the world's actuality (*genjitsusei*). As Murayama writes in his essay “The new function of photography,” for having such a visual accuracy and technical actuality, “photography is the first element that can bring art to an indispensable place in modern life.” (232)

The possibility of a non-human, inorganic and unmediated vision, was present in many theories of the global avant-garde such as in Jean Epstein's, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy's, Dziga Vertov's, and, in Japan, in the work of people like Itagaki Takao, who was a major influence on Horino. But different from the celebration of a cold machine

vision, Murayama's concern was to find life in movement, an inversion of the Marinetti-style Futurist ideal of a militaristic aesthetics of death.<sup>63</sup> In his 1923 text "Introduction to An Art With Machine Elements," Murayama seeks to map the recent history of the fascination of contemporary art with machines, paying attention to how the mechanical object could be included in his politics precisely by the way it would suggest a "dynamic, mechanic spirit" that appears *as* movement (236).

The machine would enter the sphere of life when it reveals movement, which Murayama finds in his own practice as a Mavo member: a combination of Léger's approach with a "direct sensual enjoyment of the form of the machine itself, not related to matters of the spirit" ("Introduction to an art with machine elements" 236). Looking at El Lissitzky's photo-montage, he writes that "There are moments in which the machinic product called "photography" is not machinic" (243). Adjoining different surfaces, or different *faktura* (the sensorial feeling of the work's surface), Lissitzky would be able to turn "expression" (*hyōgen*, *Darstellen*) into "construction" (*kōsei*, *Dastellen*) (243). Photography, due to its "actuality, clarity, quickness, vividness, practicality," would serve well Murayama's project of constructivism because it assembles objects collected by the subject (245). Through assemblage, it would be capable of stressing the low aspects of modern life and hence bring about change. The possibility of printing, collecting, and handling the photographs would make them, for Murayama, just another type *objects* in themselves, which can impose their presence

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63 Indeed, one interesting aspect to notice is precisely the obliteration of the militaristic parts of Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* in Murayama's quotes and translations.



and enter the world of movement and circulation. But, it is with film that the technical image becomes absence, rather than presence, troubling Murayama's fascination with the machine.

The photographic image carries some specificities which, for media theorist Vilém Flusser (2000), stem from the very obvious fact that "The technical image is an image produced by apparatuses" (*Towards a Philosophy of Photography* 14).<sup>64</sup> Their mode of production itself is dependent on an industrial machine. But the technological event of the formation of the photographic image defines it, for Flusser, as "the first of all post-industrial objects," (*Towards a Philosophy* 51) or rather an "inobject": a type of object whose qualities and meanings are not restricted to the materiality of the surface on which they reside, producing a different relation or (im)material mode of friction with the subject. (Flusser, "Do Inobjeto" 2006)<sup>65</sup> The category of the inobject, represented most predominantly by photography, in Flusser's narrative marks the entrance of a new paradigm into history, one of information, data, and of media-infrastructures. While this debate is historically pinned down usually at the late twentieth century in discussions of "post-modernism" such as Jean Baudrillard's and Bernard Stiegler's, Flusser traces it back to the very modern advent of photography.

If the industrial paradigm placed us among objects, against which the human was thus "objectified," Flusser argues, a concomitant but new paradigm arises with the advent of the technical images, their mode of production, circulation, accumulation as "inobjects." "It is no longer a matter of owning another pair of shoes or another piece

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<sup>64</sup> Hereafter referred to as "Towards a Philosophy."

<sup>65</sup> All translations of Flusser's texts in Portuguese are mine.

of furniture,” writes Flusser in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (51), but a matter of the production of a “state of things”: “a scenario in which what is significant are the relationships between things and things themselves” (*Towards a Philosophy* 85) With photography, events would have been turned into scenes that can move from surface to surface. This new paradigm brings with it not only an understanding of one difference between the industrial object—considered raw material for political art by Murayama—and the image-(in)object, but it also demands a different understanding of life itself, or the horizon of human agency.

At the center of Flusser's discussion of the technical image there is a potentiality to a non-humanist understanding of technology that makes it an important backdrop against which to read Murayama's work and experience as a conflict arising from the medium. As a mechanical apparatus built upon concepts, calculations, and discourses of instrumental reason, the camera produces its images out of an abstraction that Flusser calls the camera's *program*, that is, the possibilities through which the apparatus can act upon the subject. Instead of an individual using the camera, Flusser describes a “photographer/camera complex” in which the camera's program is necessarily in dispute and tension with the subject's intention, a matter of mutual restriction:

the choice is limited to the categories of the camera, and the freedom of the photographer remains a programmed freedom. [...] In the act of photography the camera does the will of the photographer but the photographer has to will what the camera can do. (*Towards a Philosophy* 35)

Flusser suggests that the technical image establishes a negotiation of will from the moment of its formation. In this sense, the subject would have no control over the image, rather she would be driven to an impossible exhaustion of the program, repeating and adjusting her body to the machine.

It is this inscrutable desire-making nature of the camera that Flusser calls a “black-box”: a zone of indeterminacy between subject and machine. (Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy* 27) Since one cannot know what happens in the apparatus—the set of transmissions, reactions, and calculations—, the subject needs to work around the restriction of her action down to the mere exploration of inputs and outputs:

Photographers endeavor to exhaust the photographic program by realizing all their possibilities. If they look through the camera into the world, this is not because the world interests them but because they are pursuing new possibilities of producing information and evaluating the photographic program. Their interest is concentrated on the camera; for them, *the world is purely a pretext for the realization of camera possibilities*. (*Towards a Philosophy* 26)

This operates two important inversions: the world is for the camera, rather than the camera being for the world; and the camera has an agency that is negotiated but irreducible to the subject's intentionality. It means that the technical image is a process of “indeterminacy” in which the relation between subject and world mediated through the camera can never be ascertained. Flusser calls it the “phenomenological doubt”

between body and machine, a zone of negotiation between subject and world mediated by the camera, in which the technical image—not merely its product, but ultimately its horizon—acts upon the whole body producing an infinite process of desire that drives the individual to approach reality through suspicion and repetition. (Flusser 2000, 38) It is a (negative) process of undoing individuation, since one can only be sure of their body and nothing else.

*Dialectic of Seeing: Film, Race, and Body*

“We are *attracted* to film to the extent that we cannot  
imagine our lives without film anymore.”  
(Murayama Tomoyoshi, “On Film's Realism”)

In a text from 1936 published in the journal *Japanese Film (Nihon Eiga)* called “Foreign Film Versus Japanese Film,” (*Gaikoku Eiga tai Nihon Eiga*) Murayama writes:

What exerts fascination on Japanese people in foreign films is, firstly, the developed culture and life environment that are shown there. One can see life styles/forms that are not yet available in Japan. Skyscrapers, flying boat *China Clipper*, cars with radios, private light guns, machines that print words cut into tubes, travel vans with beds--all of this we can only see in foreign films. Female secretaries, mannequins, review girls, typists: even though those are somewhat not rare in Japanese life, they were introduced to us by the cinema before their appearance in Japan. (...) Modern prisons, bright big factories,

collective residential buildings, fast cabin cruisers, grills, streamline trains, cabaret, car races, American football, there is no end to this list. It is not a matter of listing individual things, but because modern life (*seikatsu*) itself progresses in such a fast pace, it is natural that the fact of seeing it exerts a big fascination." (28)

Film is described as a traveling apparatus/commodity that presents the spectacle of different spaces of the world stirred in a sort of fast *mise-en-abîme* of objects and bodies that would mirror modernity's own progressive speed. But it is also seen as a time machine that confirms the belatedness of the Japanese material life (*seikatsu*) with images from a future that will come. The modern woman becomes another evidentiary modern object among many others. By the left side of the second page, we can see two photographs (maybe produced as still images, or maybe frames extracted from movies): U.S. American actress Judith Barrett embodies the white modern body on the top, and, on the bottom, the Japanese actress Yamada Isuzu, on a kimono, embodies what is to be changed. (29) The images of things, acts, and bodies here become still objects themselves, modern commodities *accumulated* under a type of ethnographic collectionism. He continues:

Lots of people do not understand the beauty of foreigners. But it is an inescapable fact that a great part of young Japanese people places the typical beauty on the foreigner. One can find many reasons for this. One cannot help feeling that the Greek-type face is more beautiful than the Mongolian-type face; that the white color is more beautiful than the yellow color; that high stature is more beautiful than the short one; that the long foot is more beautiful than the short foot; that a big eye is more beautiful than a small one; that a long nose is more beautiful than a short nose; that unevenness is more beautiful than

flatness; that more expressiveness is more beautiful than little expressiveness.  
(28)

Murayama's writings on film evince the medium as also a site of comparison between national and foreign images and bodies. He performs the "anthropological ambivalence"<sup>66</sup> manifested by the racial complex powerfully analyzed by Frantz Fanon's <sup>67</sup> description of the visual injunction--"Look! A Negro!"—which pins a body and a subject in motion down to the fixity of hierarchical identities, albeit a split one: "an image in third person" (Fanon) or a "third eye" (Rony), since it pulls one's eye from the scene placing it as a spectator (*Black Skin, White Masks* 90). Murayama sees himself occupying the split position of the peripheral elite subject who is reminded by film of his non-whiteness and feels entitled to dictate a judgment to his racial-national peers. Arising the self-consciousness of the peripheral national subject, it is yet another example of the "menace" and aggressiveness that Rey Chow has read in the visual encounters of the peripheral subaltern subject with the filmic image on screen: that moment when being a spectator means to understand what it is to be, at once, the object *seen* and the subject *seer*, to be seen as other, "a spectator who is equally caught up in the dialectic of seeing." (Chow 13)

As many of the non-"Western" avant-garde intellectuals and critics, Murayama as a spectator was displeased with local cinema precisely because it did not embody the white modern ideal seen in films from the US and Europe (he was particularly

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<sup>66</sup> On the idea of "anthropological ambivalence," see Chapter one, pp. 33–34.

<sup>67</sup> Fanon: "I want to be recognized not as Black, but as White." (45)

drawn to German cinema).<sup>68</sup> His encounter with film produces an injunction to modernize the Japanese body and life under the model of whiteness. The text, written as a critique of the censorship system—a struggle from the times of Prokino—would acknowledge cinema's political valence insofar as it could become a collection of evidences of the inferiority of the nation's bodies: "One cannot escape nationalism in this aspect. We need to work to elevate our cultural and life levels. We should work to have the nation fed, rationalized in their lives, physically strengthened, and to improve the human outer appearances." (29) The pedagogical role of film, based on an evidentiary display of images, appears as a form of listing, possible only once it became a photographic inventory grounded in a regime of equivalence of its parts: it does not produce a dialectical montage, and neither a continuum between them. It turns film into an iconographic accumulation, which calls for an understanding of Murayama's differentiation between the *still* and the *moving* technical image.

For Murayama, the photographic image is still *an object* that can be handled. Photography, for him, has the capacity to deliver "events, things, important historical instants (*shunkan*)" to future times, and distant spaces; to summon people's minds in just ways; to threaten the enemy; and to catch and put together, in a just, fast, and simple way, the obsolete "materials" of the world." (Murayama, "Film and Painting" 41–42) Opposite to Flusser's theory, Murayama's still guarantees photography's

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<sup>68</sup> Ironically, one of the few Japanese films towards which he expresses a positive opinion—even without having seen it—was Kinugasa Teinosuke's *A Page of Madness* (1926). About Kinugasa's film, see chapter two of this dissertation. Murayama would work with Kinugasa in the 1937 *rensageki* titled *Warahu Tegami*, in which he would experiment with film projections on stage. About this, see Lee Jungwook, "Murayama Tomoyoshi ni okeru 'engeki' to 'eizō' no tsūgō," 2012.

materiality by its capacity to be handled, touched, and acted upon. It is only when the image moves, and the subject needs to remain still, that the locus of desire is thrown onto shifting grounds.

Indeed, as a film spectator, Murayama's encounter with the moving image produces an unstable relation that constantly pulls him back, despite all negativity that emerges from this encounter. Murayama oftentimes remarks that the filmic image is ontologically *less*, because it lacks that “sense of actuality” (*genjitsukan*) of the real presence of bodies. (Murayama, “Rensageki” 15) Different from the theater, film does not offer the “physiological negotiation” between bodies on and off screen.

(Murayama, “Rensageki” 15) "There is a difference between a real woman and a woman on a photograph just like the difference between heaven and earth, cloud and mud," he writes in the essay “The Good and Bad Aspects of Film” (*Eiga no Yosa, Warusa*) in 1926. (31)

The tension brought by the encounter with white modernity on film spurred a contradiction that would need to be balanced and negotiated: while film could work as a pedagogical accumulation of objects and bodies, it was also problematic for it was, ultimately, “nothing” but light and shadow on screen, falling short of being an “effective” medium. Murayama’s main complaint was precisely that film would be an “inobject”: not concrete, less material than matter.

Although film's ontologically *lessened* corporeality might seem to stem from its photographic technical base, the fact that still photography does not spur the same frustration reveals that film's problem comes from its moving quality that operates on a specific duration—a movement that starts from the machine, and not from the



observer, who should necessarily not physically move in order to watch. In contrast, he would emphasize the importance of the photo album, which can tell a visual narrative, as film would, in a freer and more intimate way, independent from a projector and fully respondent to the gestures of the viewer's body. Proposing a media-ontological dichotomy, what would differentiate film from other media would not be its nature of a technical image, but its nature of a technical image that necessarily exists in the passing of time. Film, he remarks, is not "moving photography," not a sequence of still photographs: "film is a spatial and temporal art" ("Film and Painting" 42). And this, for him, opens an unsurmountable gap between film and photographs: 'inbjeethood' lies on mechanical *movement*. If it appears to be a question of the technical image, it is rather a question of the technical movement.

His avant-garde position as a subject who can dictate the biopolitical program of modernization—the separation between cosmopolitan modern and local non-modern—stands precisely on this gap, since it requires a type of gaze that strips away movement from the moving images, turning them into iconic objects and types to be collected, listed, and compared. If the experience of a non-white modernism is necessarily haunted by racial difference—"whiteness complex," as Deguchi Takehito names it—it is because of the negation of a temporal perception. In film, the effect of an inverted mirror stage that shows modernity through racial negativity re-emerges in Murayama's engagement with imperialist endeavors in Korea in the late 1930s.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Nayoung Aimee Kwon (2015), for example, analyzes the later engagements of Murayama with colonial Korea as a spokesperson of the avant-garde, in the occasion of his 1938 modernist theatrical production of canonical Korean tale *Ch'unhyangjon* (Tale of Spring Fragrance), in which the "whiteness complex" emerges under the

*Movement and Absence: a minor vitality*

Unlike photography, who was granted its historical role within Murayama's political economy of desire, the in-object of the moving filmic image was more problematic. What is the specific nature of the movement *in film* that would trouble his idea of political ontology of movement? What, in film's movement itself, could become an obstacle to a program for the cinema?

On a note that preceded one of his screenplays (“Joyū”) published in the journal *Eija Jidai* (Movie Time) in 1926, Murayama writes that “poetry, essay, color, and smell, through the particular techniques of the cinema, are transformed into film.” (241).<sup>70</sup> Murayama projects his idea of *life (jinsei)* onto a medium that, clearly, could not fulfill the desire of acquiring life's physical aspects such as smell. By placing into film all sorts of media and senses, he draws at once the promise of a filmic medium—to capture life in all senses—and its failure. Film's “victory,” for him, relates to the possibility of tearing down the stable distance between image and spectator through the close-up, “which bravely started the conquest of distance between camera and object.” (Murayama, “Film and Painting” 44) But, although he sees film as a means to end the individual's submission to space, for Murayama film's most fundamental

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imperialist gesture of a “colonial kitsch” that Murayama brings into the colonized space. Her reading is crucial to understand Murayama's imperial unconscious working under his avant-garde excursions in colonial Korea, evincing a common contradiction present in Left-wing peripheral avant-gardist's self-image as border controllers that manage the difference between West and the Rest. She sums it as “the act of severing an essentialized and stagnant notion of Koreanness as content from the dynamic formal level of modern Japan.” (120)

<sup>70</sup> I thank professor Iwamoto Kenji for introducing me to this text.

problem was that it lacks the physical, biological body. It promises life, but delivers “only” images. What for people like Béla Balázs was film's most important aspect—the fact that the “image, unlike the word, cannot be 'looked through'” (Balázs 2011, 20)—or Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, who emphasized filmic image’s light and shadow constitution, was for Murayama what prevented him from embracing film as a useful medium.<sup>71</sup>

Flusser compares the technical images to “surfaces that function in the same way as dams.” (*Towards a Philosophy* 19) If historical imagination is contingent upon the technologies of mediation, he argues, the technical image's particular mode of relation to time—one that is born out of a doubt produced by a nonhuman technical apparatus—disrupts the model of historical temporality from the linearity of writing to a field of desire for magical repetition in what Flusser calls a “post-historical” paradigm.<sup>72</sup> A technical image, as a dam, is seen as something that can retain whatever is moving forward and continuously. Producing an endless process of turning concepts, events, objects, and things into scenes that can slip from inobject to inobject, “every action simultaneously loses its historical character and turns into a magic ritual and an endlessly repeatable movement.” (Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy* 20) This is the source of their *hallucinatory* power: a drive to repetition through their suspended temporality. (Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images* 10).

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<sup>71</sup> See chapter one for a closer discussion of Tanizaki’s film theory.

<sup>72</sup> This is *not* the same as the “end of history” of Francis Fukuyama, but rather a different mode of relation to time, which does not move linearly forward.

However, in Murayama, precisely this hallucinatory animation, this suspending dam, will evince the paradoxical nature of repetition as a *frustrated* desire for sameness: as reminds Gilles Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*, repetition is never the repetition of the same, rather it is the evidence of its impossibility.<sup>73</sup> Film is precisely the medium that turns *movement* into an object of recording, staging, and reproducibility. Mary Ann Doane (2002) has argued that the novelty of the cinema was that, through the recording of movement, it made duration itself archivable for the first time. It makes time visible, and repeatable—hence, open to difference in itself. Not a static dam, but a different type of suspension: making movement itself repeatable, film singularizes the very experience of change inscribed in movement.

Murayama's problem with film was not the usual avant-garde despise for narrative, and also not the usual critique of the spectator's passivity, but rather it was spurred by the duration that produces an inescapable movement that defies the controlled and foreseeable temporality that validated his own position: movement as non-reason, since it cannot be controlled by the subject's will. In this sense, Murayama experiences in film the radicalization of Flusser's idea of photography's “black box” paradigm—not only the machine imposes its program on you, but it only exists as a full apparatus during the very process of imposition. It strikes Murayama as politically negative because, being ontologically less but implementing such a strong ground of negotiation between spectator and image, it requires a different ontology in order to

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<sup>73</sup> A similar experience happens in the case of Mário de Andrade, in Brazil, whose encounter with the filmic experience produces a counter-temporality that disrupts that of the teleological peripheral avant-garde. See, in detail, in chapter four.

escape the spatialized logic of judgment. Such a negotiation arising from a restricted control over the image will throw Murayama's aesthetic politics onto a different modulation, shifting the idea of action from one based on an understanding of movement as a motor transformation of the visible, towards a temporal understanding of movement. A political shift of ontologies of movement, hence of life.

Movement, which is absent in Flusser's theorizations, opens up a space for a different type of relation between subject and the world, producing a different politics of aesthetic engagement of present to future. Although for Murayama history moves (or should move) forward, his reading of film as an evidence of racial and social inferiority, needs a theoretical obliteration of the immaterial synthetic movement of film into the photographic stasis. Filmic movement goes *against* Murayama's idea of historical time and agency, and thus needs to be rejected. The unanswerable question of where movement arises—in the subject, in the image, or in the apparatus—ultimately disrupts the question of the clear boundaries between acting and seeing, modern and non-modern.

Another of film's restrictions, Murayama writes in the short essay “The restrictions of film” (*Eiga no Genkaisei*) in the journal *Kinema Junpō* in June 1, 1931, would be the fact that the technical image of film needs to produce, with no respite, an irrevocable visual sphere:

The technical image [*eizō*] can express actuality [*genjitsusei*] in a way that words cannot. However, this actuality is no more than a purely visual one. The

fact that talkies need to follow the restless [*koyaminaku*] visual reality makes their content very narrow. (67)

Murayama sees in the technical image, besides the absence of the body, the restriction that comes from its insubordination: the image will *always* and *necessarily* be on the screen. *The visual has no silence.*

For Murayama, visibility leads to uncontrollability, threatening the field of the non-visual. Although he stresses that the entrance of sound into film promised to bring music and word into the cinematic experience, he laments that it remains a purely visually oriented medium, always on the need to follow visual reality (*shikakuteki genjitsu*), and thus failing to grasp the invisible aspects of the world: feelings (*kanjō*) and sensations (*kankaku*). Besides the absence of the bodies, for him visibility also would exclude the affective dimension from the filmic, taking away life itself from it.

Superficiality, absence, and the injunction of the visible—the fact there needs to always be an image on the screen—sets Murayama on a denial for the same reason that Balázs praised it: “Words, concepts and thoughts are timeless. The image, however, lives only in the concrete present. Words contain memories; we can use them to refer to what is absent. An image speaks only for itself.” (Balázs 21) For Balázs the “pure visuality” of the filmic image creates a particular engagement with an inescapable present; or rather it reveals the present as inescapable. The most subtle—albeit huge—implication of the inescapability of the image on the screen is that it brings, from surface to surface, the filmic inobject's temporal aspect, in which the concrete present of the image constantly reminds the spectator of life's random

unfolding. If, as writes Murayama, “the deeper and more interior is a truth, the more inaccessible it is to a visual means,” (“The Restrictions of Film” 67) the problem of film would be that it does not subscribe to the equivalence between the invisible and the truth.

Being only surface, but containing an uncanny vitality, film can be threatening. Placing Murayama against Flusser, and vice-versa, allows us to think the problematic hallucinatory power that Flusser reads in the technical images as an emancipatory capacity of movement to place the sovereign subject under suspicion—which is what troubles Murayama. In the clash between an ontology of depth and one of surface, what is at stake therefore is a political capacity to inhabit the present. What joins the two statements of Murayama on filmic visibility—namely, the educational value of the white bodies on screen; and the threat of the unavoidable presence of *any image* on screen—is the relation between seeing and/in the present: respectively negation of the present through the pedagogy of an improved future, and the discomfort caused by the inexorability of the present. The absence of the physical world in the image opens up a different—temporal and moving—experience of presence.

In 1936, on a text published on the journal *Kinema Junpō*, titled “On Film’s Realism” (*Eiga no Hakushinsei ni Tsuite*), Murayama uses a sequence of Josef Von Sternberg’s film *The Salvation Hunters* (1925) to describe what he considers to be film’s capacity to grasp reality, introducing a different idea for the medium and for the very act of seeing. Murayama writes:

This movie holds a dazzling reality [*rearitii*], amidst the mud of commercialism, vulgarity, and sentimentalism that it is. But I was amazed and astonished at this movie. The abandoned beach and the crane lifting mud from the bottom of the water are *repeatedly* shot. It is not a beautified setting, but the actual things on their real place. There is no need to beautify: it is meant to express the ugly as ugly. (Murayama, "On Film's Realism" 130)

The iconography that catches Murayama's attention is similar to that of his photos with Horino Masao: the wasteful ugly, the modern decaying. In his words, the ugliness of these "stinky wasted planks and animal corpses" is bravely exhausted by the camera. But one thing that is *not* on Horino's photographs, is precisely what astonishes Murayama in the *film*: repetition and time, that which is not iconographic. Here, different from the photographs, the image itself is moving, but the action is stuck on the same space: it's a sequence of time instead of space. What catches the eye is not flow and circulation, but retention and repetition. In a new attempt to grasp film's capacity to engage with reality, Murayama's lament over absence reappears inverted, as a mode of *immersion*. By the second half of the 1930s, a new relation between vision and reality emerges through film, in what he calls film's "*hakushinsei*": "let's understand the word *hakushinsei* that I use here in a narrower sense, as something that includes a sensorial reality, a scientific accuracy, and a vividness (*namanamashisa*), more than just the general attitude of an artist in relation to reality, or just a realism that is developed as a creative method. " ("On Film's Realism" 130)

Focusing on the phenomenological experience made possible by the filmic *machine*—rather than a convention of language or the attitude of a single artist—this



shift comes at a moment when the magnitude of the major historical events proves history and reality uncontrollable in their totality, after the crushing of the optimism of avant-garde Leftist movements under state repression. Listing photographic images that promise to deliver reality in full, Murayama states his suspicion and frustration:

I have felt suspicious of the unconditional belief on the *hakushinsei* of photography. [...] photos of corpses of victims of cruel murders in crime books, photos of the deceived and injured of war, medical films, films about garbage waste, photos of sick bodies [...] (“On Film’s Realism” 130)

Unlike the false promise of photography, filmic *hakushinsei* would reveal a cleavage in reality itself: a mode of getting close to the vivid and sensorial aspect of the world's reality (*rearitii*), instead of capturing an objectifiable spatial aspect of it (*genjitsu*), which is not capturable because human access to it is itself restricted. By implying (not so consistently) a difference between *genjitsu* and *rearitii*, Murayama places film at the second pole, in which it would act—unlike photography—by the introduction of *difference* through montage. “It is not possible to vividly represent an object by simply photographing it. The object’s analysis and montage is essential. It’s not about merely photographing a face or an expression, but one needs to *reconstruct* them.” (“On Film’s Realism” 131) He writes, at this point, that art's task is to take up “reality's (*genjitsu*) truth from the bottom.” (130) And this not about delivering the actual, biological human, “but to reconstruct the human being through a totally unique technique,” which would be film's unexplored potentiality. The visible absence of the body *in* the image is thought now as a different sort of invisible presence. *Rearitii*, in

this sense, is restricted and corporeal life that, under its intrinsic epistemological restriction, can provide openness to history.<sup>74</sup> The restriction of film is, thus, analogous to the restriction of life: it points toward a *minor vitality*.

As in a later text, called “On the realism of the historical film” (*Jidai Geki Eiga no Rearizumu*, 1937), movement acquires a different ontology in which the idea of history itself needs to be altered. Looking at *jidaigeki*, or historical films, Murayama proposes an idea of history as a result of a type of complex movement whose temporality follows no pre-set rules and leaves random traces to whatever is called history. “Most things remain in history by chance (*gūzen*),” (272) and history, he writes, under the exposure to the moving image, is in the present itself and not an image of the past:

Although feudal morality is still present in current days and around us, it is necessarily something that will gradually disappear or shift. In sum, *it is something that is constantly in movement. If this movement is not represented as something that moves, one cannot say that it is true reality*. We say, in old times it used be like this. But, even in those old times, it was moving in rather complex ways. Precisely because it was moving, it reaches the present. To ascertain such a moving figure is something rather difficult.” (“On the Realism of the Historical Film” 271, my emphasis)

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<sup>74</sup> It is somewhat similar to Siegfried Kracauer’s notion of “camera-life” a life mediated, framed, with *affinity* (but not identity) to actual biological life. See Kracauer’s *Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton University Press, 1997.

Movement is described as a constantly and inescapable disruptive condition of possibility for history, in a diffuse and ungraspable relation between past, present, and future. It is only at this point that movement is embraced in Murayama's theory as an *uncertainty* introduced by film, instead of the previous understanding of it as a willed action that would not find its place in filmic medium. Murayama's writing does not form a system, but rather exposes points of tension, paradox, and conflict, spurred by the technical movement. If film, as in Murayama's own initial idea, is the ambivalent evidence of a modernity yet to come, a negativity in relation to a point in the present stemming from a future origin, looking at feudal times as something inseparable in the present reveals a shift on the idea of the image, of history, and, ultimately of movement itself. Movement, here, has turned into an experience of time, instead of the conquest of space. And, more importantly, it is a time that follows no unified agent—not the Hegelian spirit, neither the modernizing will.

### *Screens*

Besides working on several screenplays (mostly not shot), Murayama directed two films in the late 1930s (*Ren'ai no Sekinin*, 1936; *Hatsukoi*, 1939); staged some *rensageki* performances (a form that combined film and theater), and wrote several essays on film and photography, compiled in the 1928 book *Introduction to Proletarian Film* (*Puroretaria Eiga no Nyūmon*) and scattered in journals through the 1930s. His political interest on cinema is present in his engagement with the Proletarian Film League (Prokino), producing an important contribution to the

emerging movement, which left deep marks in the theory and practice of political cinema in Japan.

In 1932, Murayama also contributed the essay “History of Japanese Film” to the book *Theory of Proletarian Film*, where he writes a historical materialist narrative of the development of cinema as industry, its conditions in Japan in terms of capital accumulation, studio system, censorship, and their relation to style and modes of consumption. Although not an official member of the Proletarian Film League (Prokino), he was one of its most regular contributors as critic and theorist, apart from having his screenplays published in the group's journal *Film Transit (Eiga Ōrai)*. Prokino was a very active movement, among the most remarkable Leftist documentary collectives in the prewar world, spread all over the country in its peak, and engaged in both practice and theory based on the idea that film had an active political-pedagogical function, inspired by Soviet film theory and producing a great number of documentary films.<sup>75</sup>

Murayama's serious commitment to the group comes as no surprise, considering his belief in the political potential of art, but also in *movement* itself, the fundamental element of the medium of film. However, from his first writings on film, in the late 1920s, the medium is theorized as a *lacking* medium, and the visual experience of seeing the filmic image characterized as one in which negative affects are mixed with feelings of fascination. Not only is the body of the proletarian rarely

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<sup>75</sup> For a richly detailed history of the movement, see Abé Markus Nornes's *Japanese Documentary Film: the Meiji Era Through Hiroshima*, 2003, and Makino Mamoru's "Rethinking the Emergence of the Proletarian Film League of Japan (Prokino)," 2001.

actually present in his *Introduction to the Proletarian Film*, but film as a whole is thought as a medium of absence, attraction, and repulsion. Marginal as it is, it nevertheless emerges as a strange aesthetic body that seems to not fit quite so well in the aesthetic-political program of Murayama—who, nonetheless, would repeatedly go back to it. His repulsion and attraction reveal the tension that is opened by the different ways of receiving and theorizing movement, history, embodied perception that were brought about by the moving image projected onto a screen.

Scholars such as Wanda Strauven and Guiliana Bruno have recently reminded us that a “screen” can be different things, sometimes an obstacle between two worlds, but other times a mode of sensorial encounter and even co-inhabiting. At a moment of a historical crisis, the screened image imposes on Murayama a shift on his theory of presence and a possible different notion of history, emphasizing the restrictions of the spectator in the face of time. Film's incapacity to deliver reality as unity—as the scientificist discourse would claim—introduces a different notion of reality, which is not *given* but *reconstructed*, which is based on the frustration of the desire to know and to move, *interrupted* by the power of fascination exerted precisely on the invisible level of the interstices of repetition. If, as to WJT Mitchell's argues, an image *does* nothing, it is precisely in that nothing that a political poesis of different folds of life, history, and politics, might come forth.

## CHAPTER 4: BECOMING A CLOUD: PHOTOGRAPHY, FILM, AND NON-MOTRICITY IN MÁRIO DE ANDRADE

“Everyone was in the most functional intimacy of life, they were *only* movement; and this obscure force, unnoticed, of animal life, became so to say palpable and enjoyable, rising from the monotonous chant.” (Andrade, *Café* 52)

### *Cloud-media, Cloud-bodies* <sup>76</sup>

Writer, essayist, theorist, and photographer Mário de Andrade, a central name in Brazilian *modernismo*, was fascinated by the limits of movement. In a fleeting passage, Chico Antônio, the main character in his posthumous novel *Café* (2016), imagines a perceptual state that would turn his body into a cloud. Looking but not seeing, merely “receiving the existence of the world,” Chico Antônio performs a slow, embodied gaze that reappears in several of Andrade’s works—photographic, literary, and theoretical. When Andrade creates the fictive indigenous group Índios Dó-Mi-Sol, he imagines a sort of virtual movement that only exists in potentiality: “for not accepting the existence of movement, the Índios Dó-Mi-Dol only deploy the verbs of movement, motion, locomotion, in the conditional.” (*O Turista Aprendiz*, 147)

In this chapter I will think this cloud-like perception as the threshold of movement and non-movement, through a media-theoretical approach that sheds light on a particular politics of embodied vision. Instead of fixating the “primitive” or non-

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<sup>76</sup> Figures 32, 35, and 36, in this chapter, are reproductions of the original photographs from the Arquivo Mário de Andrade hosted at Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros – Universidade de São Paulo. Figures 33 and 34 are found in the CD-ROM “Os Diários do Fotógrafo,” released with the latest edition of *O Turista Aprendiz*, Iphan, 2015.

modern in stillness, as would be the easy reading of Andrade, my approach points to a logic of contagion and desire for optical inaction that is constantly mediated by the filmic imaginary and its perceptual situation. Stillness is not the opposite of movement, as photography is not necessarily the opposite of film. I will think Andrade's politics of movement through his photographic work, in which the cloud-like rhythms of vision imagined by him are affected by a dialectics of movement and non-movement produced by the filmic medium. I will approach the photographic images produced by him through Andrade's performance of the filmic look, premised on the dislocation of different ontologies of the technical image—the photographic stasis through the cinematic movement—in order to foreground the presence of the spectator's body.

Although rarely used to describe media, clouds bear some similarities to the technical image. With their steady, subtle, almost imperceptible movement, clouds are amorphous objects: suspended, comprised of small water droplets almost in an in-between state, not fully liquid, nor solid, neither gas. They enjoy a temporally impermanent existence. Once we get too close, they cease to be a discrete object, becoming fog-like: their separation from what is not-them becomes less clear. Clouds are figures of lightness, embodied weightlessness, similar to technical images, which media philosopher Vilém Flusser has described as “inobjects” (see Chapter 3). To grasp their ephemeral materiality and slow movement, they require an enduring gaze that surrenders to their phenomenal duration, merging with their temporality.

I follow the thread of this mode of embodiment, in order to read a political theory of movement that emerges from Andrade's photographs through the possibility

of a *cinematic ontology of the photographic*. From its early iterations, filmic ontology has been commonly grounded on film's photographic indexicality, which emphasizes the temporality of the archive, of the physical transmission of past into present—although, one must notice, to very different political claims and with very disparate theoretical inflections. Or else, in a more phenomenological vein, exemplified by works such as Vivian Sobchack's, film is seen as radically different from photographic stillness for its nature of lived experience of the present. As Sobchack puts it, such a phenomenological emphasis on the lived experience would radically distinguish “the transcendental, posited moment of the photograph and the existential momentum of the cinema, between the scene to be *contemplated*, and the scene as it is lived.” (145) From photographic *moment* to cinematic *momentum*, she sees the transition of static photograph to moving film as the shift from a temporal emptiness of “unbecoming” to one of temporal flow of becoming.

My argument here does not go *against* theirs on an exclusionary way, but moves away from their clear-cut dichotomy. I invert the order, reading the possibility of a filmic gaze to photography in Mário de Andrade, by thinking of film as a perceptual state that establishes a particular relation to movement *in* the body: a body that is the condition of possibility for an optical situation that makes an image *endure*, in whose immobility the movement of the apparatus comes to reside. If, as Sobchack argues, filmic technology brought the subjective and embodied experience of *vision* itself to the realm of the public, “hitherto only directly available to human beings as an invisible and private structure that each of us experiences as “our own”” (149), it was also the first technology that rendered embodied vision—embodied since mobile—to a



group of immobile bodies. It delivered movement to non-moving bodies, detaching the embodied visual experience of movement from physical mobility.<sup>77</sup> Instead of mapping Andrade's references to the cinema, as other have done, I will read the filmic as the embodied and dialectical relation of movement to non-movement as it appears in his work.

Thinking through and with Mário de Andrade, I look at the exposure of the immobile body to movement, seeing how the encounter between spectator and moving image unfolds as a politics of movement that gets transported to other situations of encounter. I read in his work a different political angle for movement and action, informed by (and against) the historical imagination that pushed Brazilian *modernismo*, and the avant-garde in general, 'forward.' Montaging different images and texts, this chapter pays attention to the transformation of movement and its political consequences, interweaving the movements and images that were floating in the Brazilian early twentieth century imaginary.

During his two ethnographic trips to the North and Northeast of Brazil, with brief border-crossing to Bolivia and Peru, Andrade produced around nine hundred photographs, which make up the biggest portion of his practice. His interest in ethnography and modern media such as film places his photographic work and theory in a network of images—still and moving. The image below is the first photograph taken by Mário de Andrade with his Kodak camera, affectionately named *Codaquinha*, in his 1927 trip to the Amazon (Figure 32). Andrade's travels unfold in many different

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<sup>77</sup> It is a hint at this experience that I address in the previous chapter: Murayama discovers non-motor movement when the fascist nation-state denied movement even to the most privileged of its subjects.

artifacts: a travel diary titled *O Turista Aprendiz*; several articles published in the newspaper *Diário Nacional*; the novel *Macunaíma*, which made use of his travel notes, observations, and researches, along with readings of European ethnographies of Brazil—notoriously Theodor Koch-Grünberg’s 1917 *Vom Roraima Zum Orinoco*; and hundreds of photographs that were only sparsely published during his life, and which only recently became objects of study in their own right. During the process of my research in his archive at the Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros of the University of São Paulo (IEB-USP), the photographs were made public in digital form, in a 2015 re-edition of his travel diaries. None of the images here analyzed were published while he was alive.



Figure 32: “Abrolhos, May 13 1927.” IEB-USP archive code MA-F-0142

Besides being an aesthetic object whose composition could place it with no difficulty in the glossary of the avant-garde, as many have argued,<sup>78</sup> the image is also a photograph of *looking*. It is an image of a *restricted* gaze that points towards the sea and bits of land, which could be read as directed to the “national territory” as the gaze of the Western discoverer, but which also refuses to set up any sort of perspectival stability. Although functioning as the curious gaze of the mobile explorer, it nonetheless fails to offer the promise of freedom, while also not delivering the protected space usually reserved for the voyeur: the peephole goes off-frame, and flares of light create over-exposed graphic patterns in the dark areas of the image. It becomes unclear whether the landscape inside the circle is *beyond* or *on* the black space that surrounds it, but in the confusion of depth and surface, movement seems to pertain both to the image seen and to the body that sees.

This photograph captures the workings of mediated vision for Andrade as the instance of exposure not to an object, but to an indeterminate movement of a restricted body. Unlike other readings of Andrade’s photographs, such as Esther Gabara’s and Luciana Martins’s, which stress the dimensions of proximity, intimacy, and close encounters, here I will essay a *temporal* reading of it, through a film-phenomenological problematic, which finds distance instead of closeness. The images will guide the way to think about the political relation between perception and technological mediation to draw a film theory, located in a geo-historical situation, that emerges from it.

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<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Canjani 2013, Carnicel 1993, Gabara 2008.

Traveling for Andrade was the cause of much discomfort. Troubled by the relation between moving and looking, he described himself as an “anti-traveler, . . . always traveling wounded, alarmed, and incomplete.” (*O Turista Aprendiz* 1976, 49) The mediation of the camera—and through the camera, of other images—is where the privileged mobile body of the modernizing explorer is problematized in its aesthetic experience. The question revealed by the mediated encounters here discussed is that they provide *nothing* to knowledge, but rather call for a specific type of perceptual engagement that dislocates the potentialities of moving for those of non-moving that Andrade sees in the fulfilment of the cinematic machine as a performance of a slowed and embodied gaze in his photographs. As a friction that appears in moments of failed encounters, they do not signify, or narrate, but they rather summon an *inactive* presence. Instead of the modern call for forward-movement entailed by the avant-garde—and by his own project—, the experience brings Andrade to a suspension that enables to see other things, such as labor and race.

I suggest through Andrade that the immobile body of the spectator is a medium for friction in the transnational network of moving images established by the cinema, enticed by the movement that is thrown at the spectator.<sup>79</sup> Friction, as anthropologist Anna Tsing writes, is the local grip that establishes “awkward zones” in the circulation of ideas, bodies, and objects, in global capital. If friction is the condition for movement, it also generates new directions to the forward moving motions in which images originally engage. This chapter looks at the *temporalities* of friction spurred by

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<sup>79</sup> In Hans Belting words, “bodies themselves operate as a living medium by processing, receiving, and transmitting images,” that is, they are part of the lives of the images. (5)

the entanglement between body and images that traveled—*through* and *as* capital—mediated by a body whose action’s politicality is placed under question. Charles Chaplin, film theory, ethnographic photography, the sick body with malaria, all get entangled in the particular experience that the technical image and the mechanical movement of film make possible. At the center, the body as a medium, suspended like a cloud.

*Un-moving the politics of action*

Mario de Andrade (1893-1945) was one of the most active participants of the São Paulo 1922 Modern Art Week (Semana de Arte Moderna), which figures in the official historiography as the beginning of the modernist movement in Brazil, or the point of entrance of avant-garde practices into the country.<sup>80</sup> Andrade also authored one of the most notorious twentieth century Brazilian novels, *Macunaíma* (1929), deemed a landmark for its experimentation with colloquial and indigenous vocabularies and its portrayal of an “amoral” trans-racial main character. The work became a paradigm for the image of the modern Brazilian identity, later turned into film by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade’s notorious late Cinema Novo work, in 1972. Also a musicologist, art critic, theorist, photographer, Andrade was arguably one of the most influential intellectuals of modern Brazil, such that his work is inseparable from the very idea of Brazilian modernity.

In a 1942 speech, delivered on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the São Paulo Modern Art Week of 1922, Mário de Andrade recast its political-aesthetic

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<sup>80</sup> For a detailed historical account of the 1922 Modernist Art Week, see Nicolau Sevcenko 1992.

narrative in what would be one of the harshest critiques of the movement. In the midst of a general historical disenchantment, with the devastation of the war in Europe and Asia, and the Estado Novo dictatorial regime of Getúlio Vargas (1937-1945), which had pulled him out of his position as secretary of culture for the city of São Paulo, a melancholic Andrade pronounces a verdict on the failure of his generation to bring formal experimentation to the service of social transformation:

I am convinced that we should have transformed ourselves from speculative into speculators. There is always some way to slip into an angle of vision, a choice of values, into the blur of a teardrop that swells the unbearable of the world's conditions. No. We became abstemious and transcendental abstentionists. But that is precisely why I was very sincere [*sinceríssimo*], that I wished to be fruitful and that I played with all the cards at sight, now I reach this consciousness that we have been rather out of date [*inatual*]. Vanity, all vanity... ("O Movimento Modernista" 253)

His critique is aimed at their "abstemious and transcendental abstentionism" which, he implies, led him and his generation to a position of passive speculative spectatorship. The problem is less of the world, whose condition is not reducible to one's will, but rather of the mode of engagement with it—of how to visualize beyond the "blur of a teardrop" that maximizes the world's negative condition. His distaste for their present situation, the "unbearable of the world's conditions," is based on the fact that they are *not in the present*, that they are *out-of-date*, that they do not correspond to the call of the times. The failure to properly see out of the "blur of a teardrop" means to be in the temporal structure that Johannes Fabian calls the "denial of coevalness": to be placed

outside the (modern, European, white) historical present, to be the *object* of the modern episteme.

The narrative that traces an arc from the fast-paced optimism of the 1920s formal experimentations to the dark and arrested pessimism of the 1930s—a shift that Andrade performs in his own speech—fits well into the consolidated narrative that, as Pedro Fragelli recalls, tells that “the disappointment with the conservative tones of the 1930 Revolution<sup>81</sup> led the main Brazilian intellectuals, in Antonio Cândido’s expression, to become aware of the underdevelopment of the country.” (87) Hinging questions of action (being a spectator), distance (being peripheral/underdeveloped), and temporality (being non-contemporaneous), it is as if being non-active—letting go off the “leash” of political reality—had contributed to the country’s fall into the state of a belatedness in relation to the advanced row of nations. In the same speech, Andrade further complicates the binary relations:

I don’t have the least reservation in affirming that my work represents a happy dedication to problems of my time and my land. I helped with things, machined things, did things, so many things! And, nonetheless, I’m left with the sentence that I did too little, because all my achievements derived from a vast illusion. (“O Movimento Modernista” 252)<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The 1930 Revolution refers to the coup that gave power to Getúlio Vargas, who had lost the presidential elections in the same year. The new government brought the “Old Republic” (*República Velha*) to an end, gaining the support of sectors of the Left by the social democratic hopes of taking the country out of the hands of the São Paulo and Minas Gerais oligarchies. Mario de Andrade was part of the Partido Democrático, one of the few political parties in São Paulo that supported Vargas for the 1930 elections. But as the Vargas government rose to growing authoritarian tones, with communist persecution, finally culminating in the second coup of 1937 that initiated the authoritarian regime of Estado Novo, those hopes and political support were proven wrong. See Leandro Konder 43-51.

<sup>82</sup> “Não tenho a mínima reserva em afirmar que a minha obra representa uma dedicação feliz a

The “many things” that he had done include centrally the period in which Andrade “sacrificed” his activities as a writer and artist in order to actively implement policies for the democratization of culture and education as a secretary to the city of São Paulo.<sup>83</sup> From 1935 to 1938, during the rise of Vargas’ state of exception, and the purge on communist activities in the country, Andrade served as head of the Department of Culture of the Municipality São Paulo, playing an important role in carving out and consolidating a space for popular culture in the political agenda of the country. Through institutional breaches, he became the first intellectual to implement cultural policy as a means of social inclusion, implementing a leftist agenda in an increasingly conservative environment, until he was tacitly forced out of office.<sup>84</sup> As has become notorious, Andrade’s political commitment comes through his ideas on culture as common good, the promotion of inclusion of Afro-Brazilian population, his support for proletarian arts and culture, the establishment of the Society for Ethnography and Folklore, directed by Dina Lévi-Strauss, in 1936, and the creation of the Mission for Folklore Researches in 1938, which produced several audio and visual

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problemas do meu tempo e minha terra. Ajudei coisas, maquinei coisas, fiz coisas, muita coisa! E no entanto me sobra a sentença de que fiz muito pouco, porque todos os meus feitos derivaram de uma ilusão vasta.” (252)

<sup>83</sup> Pedro Fragelli uses the notion of “sacrifice” to read how Andrade understood his own political activities *in detriment* to his creative work. I would point out that this very notion, which does not appear consistently in Andrade’s writings, is nonetheless consistent with his ambivalent relation to the notion of artistic autonomy.

<sup>84</sup> See the very rich edition on his period in office by Carlos Augusto Calil and Flávio Rodrigo Penteado (2016). Also see Martins 2013. In 1935, just after the failed Communist Revolution (*Intentona Comunista*), members of the Communist party and Marxist intellectuals suffered persecution and faced imprisonment by the Vargas regime. Leandro Konder calls attention to the fact that Andrade never fully declared alignment with Marxism but he was a supporter of contemporary communist struggles, as is clear in his article “Comunismo,” published in *Diário Nacional*, on November 30, 1930.



recordings of indigenous music and performance in the interior of the country.<sup>85</sup> All of which, he evaluates in 1942, “derived from a vast illusion.”

Most of the vast array of commentators and scholars of his life and work are ready to praise Andrade as an engaged intellectual.<sup>86</sup> Drawing a positive picture of Andrade, the usual narrative tends to read his affective negativity as a sign of his elevated moral standards. However, for Andrade, the problem was one of positionality: “My aristocratism has punished me. My intentions deceived me,” (“O Movimento Modernista” 252) he writes. Although the narrative is delivered as a realization at its point of closure—“I am suspicious of my past” (254)—, the problem of *action* and of political will had constantly haunted Andrade. “I don’t imagine myself as a politician of action [*político de ação*]. But we are living in the political age of man, and I needed to serve this purpose.” (253) If, on the one hand, Andrade did not want to abstain himself from the issues of his time, as he puts, “behind the contemplative doors of a monastery,” on the other, he also refused to “write explosive pages, fighting for ideologies and winning the easy glories of the prison. All this is not me and not for me.” (253) He seemed to doubt the reach of his own political will: the politicality of his possibility of action, which entails a space in which one can *move*. He experienced a polarized tension which would never be resolved that demanded another idea of action that could imagine a way through the restriction of one’s possibility of effective movement.

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<sup>85</sup> For example, during his time in office, he commissioned the construction of parks, libraries, and other cultural venues in proletarian neighborhoods of São Paulo. He also commissioned events for Afro-Brazilian culture, celebration of the abolishment of slavery, and for proletarian arts.

<sup>86</sup> See for example, Penteadó 2015, Calil 2015, Cândido 2011, Moraes 1999.

The frustration and negative tone of his analysis do not stem from the failure to act, but rather from the failure to find a particular mode of non-action, or a way out of the dichotomy action/non-action. In other words, the problem of how to leave behind the equation of *action* to the political, which, as I hope to show in the coming sections, had been latent in his work as an issue of embodiment. An aesthetic problem: how to be a body, physical and perceptual, within a world that is mapped by power relations that are inseparable from one's very presence.

Andrade, in his speech, seems to evoke the dichotomy between acting and contemplating, according to which, as Ariella Azoulay (2012) reminds us, the political lies in the sphere of action, from which seeing would be excluded. It is from this framework—the relation between action, movement, and seeing—that I will read his images in what follows. Placed in dialogue, or friction, Andrade's Amazonian photographs and his thought on visual media suggest that the political in seeing emerges through the blurring between action and non-action, movement and stillness, and, ultimately, absence and presence. The optical situation in which Andrade finds himself—the restriction of a physical body that nonetheless enjoys the freedom to move, as a modernizing urban subject—reverberates in his writings and in his photographs. His recurrent return to an idea of movement, instead of foregrounding motion as an engagement of a future-oriented present, reveals the encounter with a mediated optical situation as an opening of the present for a type of dwelling through the receiving of movement.

*Malarial Gaze and the Cinematic Situation: receiving movement, becoming time*

On June 18, 1927, Mario de Andrade and his travel companions Olívia Guedes Penteado, her niece Margarida Guedes Nogueira (Mag), and modernist painter Tarsila do Amaral's daughter Dulce do Amaral Pinto (Dolur), crossed the border between Peru and Brazil. Arriving at Remate de Males, they go off-board into a “disgraced land” where “no one does anything” (*Turista Aprendiz* 2015, 117), as he is informed. Dona Olívia, the rich coffee capitalist, “had taken not even ten steps on land, went back to hide in the cabin, in order not to see those people, without exception, eaten by malaria” (*Turista Aprendiz* 2015, 117). She stays onboard. During the trip, the question of whether to look is central to Andrade, who experiences the cleavage between being, looking, and seeing. However, in order to experience, one needs to bring one's body into the scene—so the question is not *whether* to look, but *how* to look.

Among the 530 pictures from his 1927 trip, Andrade took only five pictures during that day. None of those include any human subject. The absence of the human in the land devastated by malaria is one of the moments in which the image and the text of the diary appear in disjunction. In a “research” trip animated by the concern with cataloguing indigenous words, objects, and mapping unknown lands, the fact that the image does not follow the same route is revealing, although not that surprising. In the midst of his discomfort with traveling, the sign of a diseased body, “eaten by malaria,” could become the most obvious token for the spectator's own self-comfort.



Remate de Males, 18 junho, 1927  
*Aqui outrora se tomaram banhos*

Figure 33: Remate de Males, June 18, 1927. Photograph by Mario de Andrade.  
 Caption: “Here erstwhile showers were taken.” From CD-ROM “Os Diários do  
 Fotógrafo.” Iphan, 2015.

Among the images of that day, he printed twice the one above, in different sizes. His usual prints were of small size (3,7cm x 6,1cm), but he would choose specific images to undergo a second and bigger enlargement of 12,5cm x 17,5 cm, in sepia with contrast correction. This was one of those. The first caption, on the smaller print, reads “Here, erstwhile, showers were taken,” (Figure 33) the second, in the larger photograph, more descriptive, says “Amazonian bathrooms.” (Figure 34) Unlike Dona Olivia, who actively decides *not* to see, Andrade decides to enter the “disgraced land”—whose disgrace was actualized in its inhabitant's bodies—while, at the same time, not photographing any of them. Instead, the photo that he finds most appealing is, indeed, a photograph of time: “erstwhile” (Figure 2).

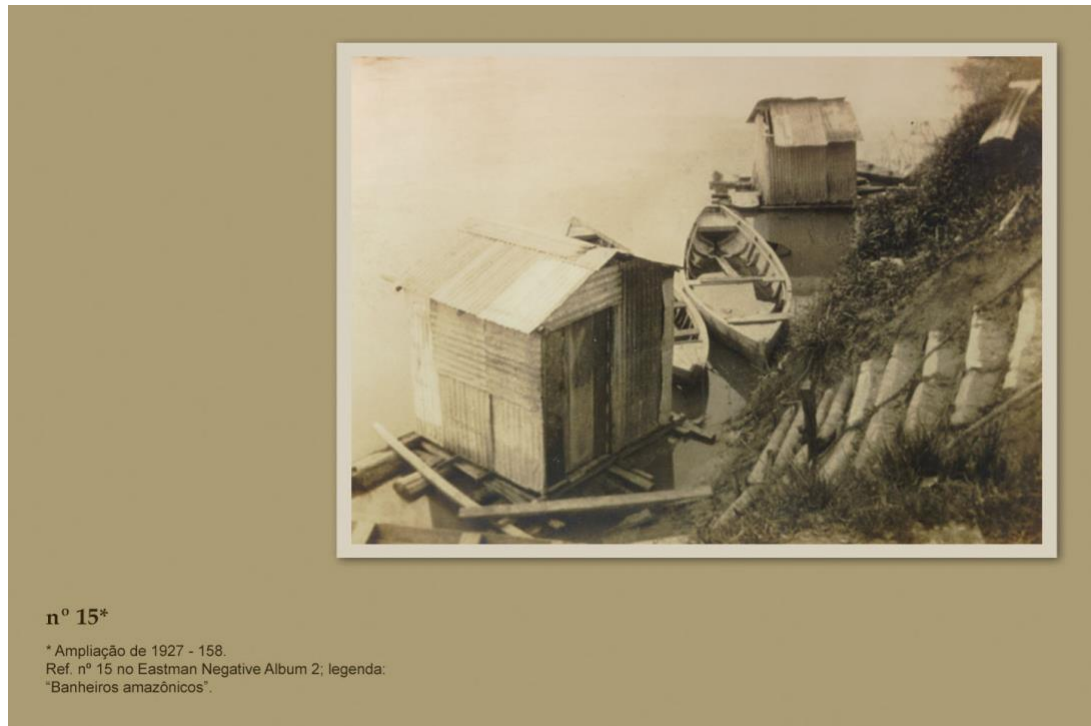


Figure 34: Photograph by Mario de Andrade. Caption: "Amazonian bathrooms." From CD-ROM "Os Diários do Fotógrafo." Iphan, 2015.

What lies not *between* the photographs, but somehow *within* them, is not the visible-sayable conundrum, and neither the *jouissance* of the Barthesian *punctum*, but a stretch of time that affects the mode of physical engagement in the very act of looking. The first image points to a temporality of the bygone, "erstwhile," while the second, as almost a correction to the first approach to the image, erases that temporality in favor of a more seemingly straightforward description: "Amazonian bathrooms."

The particularity of the image is that what it describes as "bathrooms," the place where "erstwhile" showers were taken, is not clear.<sup>87</sup> It seems to function as a

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<sup>87</sup> I thank José Gatti, who in a bright and stimulating conversation during the seminar "Displacing Latin America Film, Media, Literature" at the ACLA 2017 pointed to the unclarity of the photo. I also thank for the organizers Ramayana Lira and Alessandra Brandão, and all participants, for the very

deictic—here are the bathrooms—but actually performs a disorientation: what is the image showing? Does the caption refer to the constructions by the river shore? Or are the bathrooms the water of the river itself? Erasing “erstwhile,” Andrade erases not only any possibility of nostalgia, but he also opens the image to a sort of ongoingness, in a temporality of becoming that Vivian Sobchack associates to the cinematic: “coming into being” instead of the Barthesian “has-been” of photography.

What is there to be seen? Not clear whether the object of the gaze is the river or the sheds, Andrade calls for an open mode of perceptual engagement that will enable to see the present as the indiscernibility between natural (the river) and constructed (the bathroom). Despite the initial goal of experiencing Amazonian purity, the timeless ground zero of the nation, on several occasions Andrade, through the mediation of the technical image and its uncertain mode of looking, finds an entangled temporality that is never abstract. The time of the river *is* the time of its extraction: shed, boats, and water are equally historical. The wild, timeless, primitive nature, is neither wild nor primitive, as much as it has never been: its time is embodied in the ongoing slow violence of capitalism, always-already a ruin of the present.<sup>88</sup> The image, instead of “erstwhile,” does not point to an *elsewhere*, neither does it exist in the gaps, but it is installed and embodied in the process of the material existence—and *extraction*—of that space.

Only by engaging such a slow gaze this juxtaposition can be perceived. The slight shift of temporal focus seems to emphasize the ambivalent status of what is

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engaged conversation about my paper.

<sup>88</sup> I borrow the expression “slow violence” from Rob Nixon, for its capacity to grasp the semi-invisibility of extractivist capitalism’s long temporality. See Nixon 2011.

there to be seen, bringing the viewer's attention to the *present* of that space in front of the camera, while refusing to pin it down to a closed and fixed state. We are asked to dwell on the present of the act of looking. It establishes the photograph not as trace, but rather as the opening of a drifting relation, making the image a *temporal object*—durational like a film—through the way it produces a cinematic situation of looking.

I bring the concept of the temporal object from philosopher Bernard Stiegler's work on cinematic time, through a rather idiosyncratic conceptual move.<sup>89</sup> By definition, a temporal object—a concept that Stiegler himself idiosyncratically borrows from Edmund Husserl—could never be a still image, since it is an object whose appearance is contingent with its disappearance. Its existence does not endure. Husserl uses the example of the melody: it exists not only *in* time but *through* time. Mirroring the temporal structure of consciousness, the temporal object would give access to the very act of perception. Stiegler sees film as a temporal object for its durational nature, disagreeing with Husserl, for whom the recorded nature of film already places it outside of the realm of “pure perception.”<sup>90</sup> As writes Stiegler, film “weaves itself into our time; it becomes the temporal fabric of those ninety or fifty-two minutes of unconscious consciousness that is characteristic of a being, a film viewer, strangely immobilized by motion.” (Stiegler 11) A film is a temporal object because it imposes the experience of its unfolding duration onto our perception—

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<sup>89</sup> For a more detailed debate over the different media temporalities, in and out of Stiegler, see Villarejo 2014, 66-80.

<sup>90</sup> The difference between Husserl and Stiegler will not be fully addressed here, but one could say that they differ in their very premises: Husserl doing a phenomenology of presence—that Derrida calls a recasting of metaphysics—with its belief on an “outside” to language; and Stiegler engaging in the post-structuralist deconstruction paradigm. One could say, however, that the two agree as their critique of sight as a sense: for Husserl because it is too embodied and deceiving, and for Stiegler because it is too passive and uncontrollable.

which Stiegler sees, following Adorno and Horkheimer, as a political danger in the context of the “broadcasting industry.”<sup>91</sup>

If, as Sobchack argues, unlike photography, film offers a lived experience of the situation of viewing, it is precisely because film is such a temporal object: its unfolding is the very structure of becoming, of “coming into being.” In her words, “the cinema’s visible inscription of the dual, reversible, and animated visual structure of embodied and mobile vision radically transforms the temporal and spatial structure of the photograph” (*Carnal Thoughts* 150). Such a perceptive structure resists its own reduction into the photographic unit of time and space (*Carnal Thoughts* 150). As she writes, the photographic “abstraction of its visible space, its single and static *point* of view,” would not open time to be inhabited: instead of *living* the image as in film, she argues that photography produces only contemplation. Not being a temporal object, it would give itself to *be only looked*.

Being *lived*, film requires a lived situation to exist. And, not being a spatial object, which can be possessed, but rather a temporal object whose experience *demand*s time, the cinematic situation is that of *surrendering to another’s time*. For its inescapable duration, the filmic experience reminds us, in Stiegler words, that “my time is always the time of the other” (Stiegler 31–32). As Sobchack emphasizes, cinematic time constitutes a *situation* of viewing, in which mobility is not performed

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<sup>91</sup> That is precisely where Stiegler, following Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the culture industry, flags film’s danger: the risk of a full capture of human consciousness by the temporality of a machine serving capital’s interests. If film is equal to consciousness, the mass adoption of industrialized filmic time opens the way to “the commerce of bodies, ideas, and goods.” (90)



by the spectator's body, but rather felt as the unfolding of an autonomous and situated temporality of the film-body: "The very mobility of [film's] vision structures the cinematic subject (both film and spectator) as always in the act of displacing itself in time, space, and the world ... it is always eluding its own (as well as our) containment" (Sobchack *Carnal Thoughts* 150). Film would perform the very structure of embodied, subjective vision (that is, vision as we experience it), and make it shared. The filmic situation of disorientation and loss of the exclusivity of seeing, which stems from the movement on the screen, delivers temporal uncertainty to the *immobile* spectator's body.

What I want to retain here is this filmic experience of a body, which experiences seeing as an embodied experience of time as suspended movement in front of an image—or of the visible world. An embodied experience of both opening time and becoming (in) time, made possible by the encounter with the filmic screen. Living intensely the film-saturated media environment of modernizing Brazil, Andrade had the encounter with the moving image already embedded in his sensorial apparatus.<sup>92</sup> It is the (privileged, modernizing, but also guilty) body, inhabiting this particular experience of movement and disorientation, that emerges "strangely immobilized by motion," as Stiegler put it (11). If we follow Wendy Chun's suggestion that media make their way into the habitual temporalities of our lives, becoming ingrained in our corporeal rhythms and attitudes, it is possible to see the filmic performance of looking in Andrade transposed to his other mediated images

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<sup>92</sup> For historical accounts on the boom of movie-going in the modern urban spaces in early twentieth-century Brazil, see, among others, Sevchenko 1992, Schvarzman 2005, Navitski 2017.

through his relation to time.

Indeed, as Telê Ancona Lopez suggests, Andrade's incursion into the Amazon is deeply steeped in film culture, theory, and criticism, reflected in his discontentment with "being just an enchanted spectator." (quoted in Cunha 155) Andrade, for whom "the true material for the artist is the spectator," believed that the position of spectator was a democratic one: "the more objectified the creation, the artist ceases to exist becoming a spectator like all." ("Inerência do Deslumbramento à Beleza") A traveler and photographer, he was also a film spectator who, as Cunha reminds us, was a frequent visitor of movie theaters not only in the bourgeois environment of São Paulo but also during his trip to the interior of Brazil. This media-corporeal attitude of the immobile filmic spectator, which turned himself into a medium for cinematic images, mediates and politically dislocates his encounters.

Upon going back aboard, Andrade sees a boat carrying a "dark skinned, strong Peruvian man, with live blood behind his dark skin." (*Turista Aprendiz* 2015, 117) The Peruvian man, who "looked like [the Hollywood actor] Richard Barthelmess," fascinates the group of travelers, who cannot help staring. He adds, "but entirely devoured by malaria, his skin, of an absurd smoothness, was of an earthy brown devoid of pleasure." (117–8) The two girls, Mag and Dolur, try calling his attention, but he does not *look*. "All the noise that we made, nothing interested him not even for a peep, he did not look." (118) After this encounter, Andrade, he writes, "desired malaria, but a malaria like this, that ends the curiosities of body and soul ... to have malaria like this, so nothing more would interest me in this world in which everything interests me too much." (118) The "face of an extraordinary beauty" (117) of the

Hollywood actor Richard Barthelmess reveals filmic imaginary as the primary mediation for the situation of looking, betraying a perception pervasively mediated by the filmic situation.

As an infected spectator, in this scene of gazes and non-gazes, what Andrade desires is the mode of looking that is at once purely physical, present, consonant with the drifty gaze called for by his “Amazonian bathrooms” photograph. The malaria gaze, “a gaze that only received the notion of what existed,” (“Maleita II” 458) is an embodied gaze, contingent upon the subject's body in its present situatedness that sees nothing: it opens the present to a ‘waiting without an object.’ Andrade experiences a gaze that emerges from the desire for non-desire—the desire for *mere* embodiment—spurred by the filmic mediation of Richard Barthelmess in the black Peruvian body, performing no futurity and no nostalgia. He desires, through malaria, the cinematic situation itself: to be a spectator’s body, gazing immobile and inactive, exposed like a photographic film to the world.

Sergei Eisenstein, in 1924, had already used a biological analogy to theorize film. As is commonly known, Eisenstein suggested that the core of the filmic medium lies not on the image per se, but on the relation established by image and spectator. Different from photography, film, he claims, is an “art of comparison” that unfolds in time and that, more importantly, through montage, produces a “*physical infectiousness*.” (Eisenstein 42) The vocabulary of biological contagion, which works for Eisenstein’s investigation of the transmission of on-screen motion to the muscular structure of the spectators—aiming for revolutionary agitation—in Andrade is imagined for the opposite purpose: a contagion of non-motricity.

Four years later, in 1931, Andrade revisits this experience and names it the “philosophy of malaria” (*filosofia da maleita*), in a revision of the diary entry published as a series of two texts for the newspaper *Diário Nacional*. (“Maleita I” 454) In this version, he erases any reference to the imaginary mediation of Richard Barthelmess and, instead, describes it as an experience of *direct contact*, a sort of natural sublime in the encounter with the man’s malarial gaze. It shows, at once, the desire and the failure of the primitivist fetish: between placing and displacing the “malaria gaze” in and out of a natural state, repressing the “impurity” of the mediated imaginary along with the image of the white male actor. He writes that, in the Amazon,

all notions disappear, of time, of life, of need, of progress, all activities, even the most precarious, of verifying, of judging. It is not worth moving anymore, not even a gesture. (...) curiosity is the primary element of progress... it has produced suffering and produces suffering. Above all, it *de-deifies* man. Curiosity is a curse. And in the lands of vast heat it is simply *made in Germany* (...) That is why I dream with malaria, which is bound to end my curiosity and will soothe my disgraced vanity of needing to be someone in this competition here in the South. (“Maleita II” 457)

The cinematic state imagined by Andrade exists in an infected body—infected by a “third-world” disease. If Andrade’s queer gesture emerges through his drive towards Barthelmess’s “face of an extraordinary beauty,” it is further politicized in its geopolitical restrictedness. Sara Ahmed’s queer phenomenology offers a productive

way to read these two instances: the queer gesture towards movement, she suggests, entails the *dislocation of the centers* that orient our motions, confusing “objects and subjects according to how they already appear.” (Ahmed 33) The disorientation dreamt by Andrade is queered also inasmuch as, *centered* in the *marginal* zone of the malaria-filled Amazon, it *rejects* motion. Through the friction of the Hollywood film star with the Peruvian body, a disorientation emerges. Emphasizing the locatedness of this malarial gaze “here in the South,” Andrade disorients, on the dimension of desire (for non-motricity), the geo-historical question that set the avant-garde in motion: to be oriented towards the (metropolitan) center.

Malaria embodied the ambivalence of a perceptive state of detachment associated with backwardness, immobility, and unproductivity, but which was the very product of the drive to modernization.<sup>93</sup> From the late nineteenth century to the end of the first World War, malaria went beyond an endemic issue to an epidemic problem to the Amazon region, as a result of the boom of the rubber extraction industry. In the period, Brazil produced half of the world’s rubber, and in the Amazon malaria had an eighty-percent morbidity rate. (Stepan 26-27) Malaria was only *primitive* in its embeddedness in the process of capitalist accumulation.

During the construction of the monumental railway project of the Madeira-Mamoré Railway, which would provide efficient distribution for rubber extracted from the Amazon to overseas markets, malaria became an urgent problem because it risked halting the construction works (1907-1912). Attracting a large number of

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<sup>93</sup> See Stepan 27.

impoverished workers from the Brazilian Northeast and elsewhere, malaria infected ninety-percent of the Madeira-Mamoré Railway Company's workforce of thousands of men. (Stepan 29) Indeed, it was necessary for capital to eradicate static inertia to keep the workers' bodies mobile—from tree to tree, from poor areas to the unfulfilled promises of extractive modernity. Malaria, as a state of immobility, threatened to interrupt the movement of capital almost as an autoimmune contagion: the faster the movement, the stronger the interruption.

Andrade himself is struck with the realization that his presence in the Amazon is already implicated in the extractive forces that turned malaria into a deadly epidemic in the region. Traveling on the Madeira-Mamoré train, he writes:

Thousands of Chinese, Portuguese, Bolivians, Barbadians, Italians, Arabs, Greeks, have come for some Money. All types of noses and skins walked around here lying themselves with a bit of a fever at dawn to rise in the never more. What have I come here for!... Today the poet travels with his friends, in the Madeira-Mamoré, in a tidy inspection car, well seated in shit-vine seats, sorry for the expression, strictly made by the strong men of Manaus. (...) Sometimes we stop, the landscapes will be *kodakized*, even cinema is brought in! (*Turista Aprendiz* 2015, 158)

In the train, the immobile spectator—the train passenger itself was the prototype for the cinematic situation—infected by the moving images, finds himself politically interpellated through non-action, not as a mode of withdrawal, but rather as an exposure to his own presence: exposed to the slow temporality of capital, throwing the

extracting subject into a sick and disoriented presence.<sup>94</sup> The malarial gaze, unfolds in the action of not acting, of looking without seeing, or seeing without looking.

Mediated by the technical image of the cinema, it establishes a relation to the unfolding duration of the present as an intransitive waiting; waiting for nothing. In the embodied filmic situation, it produces an encounter with the very act of seeing.

What the malarial/filmic gaze finds is labor. Consonant with how Sara Ahmed critically reads Husserlian phenomenology through Marx, the *immobile* body, “receiving the notion of what exists,” finds the *motion* that is abstracted into static self-identity on the surface of the commodified spaces and object. It is reminded that “what arrives not only depends on time, but is shaped by the conditions of its arrival.” (Ahmed 40) Andrade’s optical situation undoes the phenomenological self-presence of objects and bodies (the workers, the train seats) through their history of labor, their “what comes before” that is abstracted into the present is returned as *temporal depth*. As an inactive spectator receiving movement, Andrade’s inaction as contamination emerges as a way to scavenge what is made invisible for the curious gaze of the ethnographer in its act of fetishizing the pure atemporality of the primitive origin. But, at the limit, it also leads to his own erasure, exposing the spectator to its participation

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<sup>94</sup> *Exposure* here has a twofold meaning. One is the analogy to the process of exposure that the photographic film goes through to be affected by the environment. The other one refers to the anti-Kantian aesthetic experience that it suggests. Although the similarities seem obvious at first—even Andrade will rehearse this connection—it is clear that this “malarial gaze” is not a Kantian disinterested aesthetic judgment, since it produces an entangled, the opposite of the detached subject.<sup>94</sup> Instead of a normative call for a *sensus communis* in the unity in feeling, the perceptual state that Andrade imagines is a more ambivalent one: a type of *exposure* as thought by Jean-Luc Nancy as a mode of being-together premised on the impossibility of a total communion of subjects within and among themselves, an ethics of exteriority of “being-in-common” inasmuch as it “is not a common being.” (Nancy 29)

in the process of slow violence that turns the present in an open ruin of itself: “What is the reason of all these international dead that are reborn in the sound of the train and come with their dimly lit little eyes peep me through the car window?” (Andrade, *Turista Aprendiz* 2015 159) When the gaze returns, the spectator himself is reminded of the conditions for his own arrival, as the condition of possibility for the very extraction that makes the commodified bodies and spaces to arrive in front of him. Disorienting movement, it dislocates the moving subject.

This ambivalent mode of looking appears repeatedly in other moments of Andrade’s work. In his novel *Café*, the character of Chico Antônio, coming from the interior of the Northeast to the big city of São Paulo, overwhelmed by the fast pace of the modern space, is described by his particular perceptual presence:

[He had] his most absolute pleasure and most constant vice in the moments of absolute, a-intellectual dilution of personality that he reached in the coco singing circle, in certain gazes directed to the sun, or in front of surprises such as the recent one crossing the Carmo meadow: the constant emptiness that kept him in a state of armistice so vegetable that didn’t even arrive to an acknowledgment of vitality—an endless monotony. (*Café* 97)

Chico Antônio embodies the malarial gaze, which can turn him in into a non-human being, as we know by our first encounter with this state: “Everyone was in the most functional intimacy of life, they were *only* movement; and this obscure force, unnoticed, of animal life, became so to say palpable and enjoyable, rising from the monotonous chant.” (*Café* 52, my emphasis) The sort of immobility that opened his body so that “sensations flew within him” (*Café* 98) entails, instead, an intimate



relation to movement, in which movement becomes non-movement by the repetitive nature of addictive inertia. To be “only movement” is to be beyond the human, to “abandon one’s body to become a cloud.” (*Café* 133)

The image of movement, which begins as a vital functionality and exceeds vitality to become emptiness, is born out of type of gaze that does not imply stillness, but that also does not lead to action. Andrade’s desire of immobility betrays the fact that his physical mobility is enjoyed due to his “internal colonizer” position: the call for immobility reveals the paradoxes of movement in the very contradiction of being an avant-garde intellectual that can think and unthink the nation.

### *Regaining Time*

Fleshing out different temporalities within the “now,” this cloud-like filmic perception produces different forms of inhabiting time—and returns time to bodies and spaces deemed atemporal. As wrote Jean Epstein, one of the few film theorists Andrade is known to have read, “That our time is the framework of a variable dimension, in the same way as our space is the place for three kinds of relative dimensions, can now be understood by everyone because we can now see the lengthening or shortening of time on screen” (Epstein 21).<sup>95</sup> If time was an object that became uncertain through filmic technology in the early twentieth century, its political stakes lie in what it reveals about the role of time in national-historical projects.<sup>96</sup> What other dislocations can this temporal friction evoke?

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<sup>95</sup> Epstein, besides appearing as a metonym for the cinema in the early poetry of Andrade, also figured in his collections of film criticism. See Cunha 2011.

<sup>96</sup> For this, see the richly researched book of Jimena Canales *A Tenth of a Second*.

On 17 June, 1927, one day before encountering the Amazonian bathrooms and the malarial gaze, Andrade takes the picture below at the port of Assacaio. (Figure 35) This photograph seems to capture his attention. He enlarges it in different sizes and tonalities. Something that seems to go beyond the usual ethnographic portraiture brings him back to the image. In his travel diary, he writes: “Legitimate indians, playing black [*bancando o negro*], painted with jenipapo. They do not paint the knucklebones, which remain resembling light-colored scars, it is horrible. I photographed.” (*Turista Aprendiz* 2015, 115)



Figure 35. Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros (IEB-USP), archive code MA-F-0282.

On the back of the first and smallest copy, the caption reads: “The taller is blackened [*enegrecido*], painted with jenipapo.” (Figure 36) We can see that, at first, the caption included the word “black” (*negro*) which gets crossed out in favor of one that denotes the result of a process, “*enegrecido*”--blackened. Also, the first choice was a verb of state, *estar*, which he chooses midway to substitute for a verb of being, *ser*.

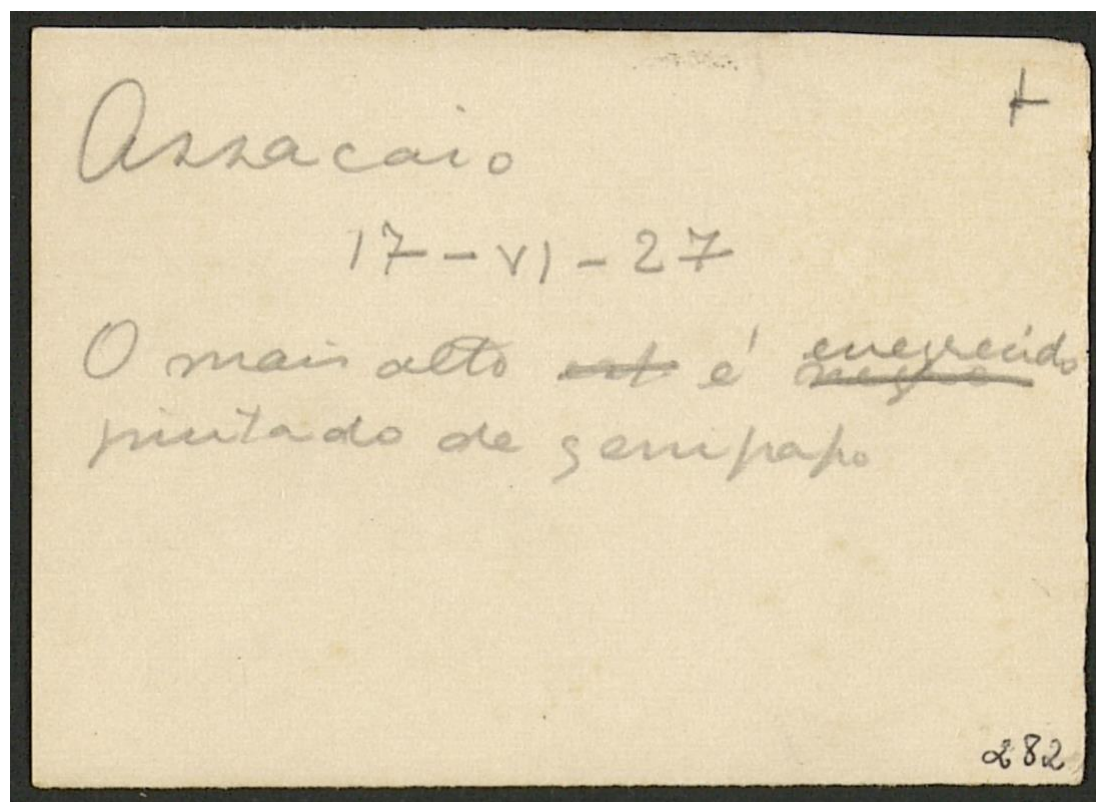


Figure 36. Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros (IEB-USP). Archive code MA-F-0282, verse.

The temporal order of the inscription, from “black”, through “blackened”, to “playing black” (*bancando o negro*) reveals a gradual *shift* from interior to surface, from state to performance. Instead of *estar negro*, which implies the state of *black* as a

momentary detour from identity, the choice of *ser enegrecido* turns the transitory into a *state of process*. It acknowledges what is seen *as* surface, and being as process. There is no proper end or beginning to return to: from “black” to “blackened,” from *estar* to *ser*, it is a matter of openness, or becoming, instead of change. His arrival, to use Sara Ahmed’s terminology, is his very open becoming (through) time.

The series of looks undoes its own seriality. First, the awkwardness of the aesthetic displeasure brings Andrade to the act of photographing. And from the encounter, through the words on the diary, to the examination of the developed photograph, the act of looking returning to the image its temporal depth, by placing it on a structure that eludes chronology. Moreover, from an aesthetic discomfort, it refuses the idea of *state* as atemporal, to one that presupposes a gesture, first with an agent (playing), then a diffuse action (blackened) whose agency is dislocated. It designates a *movement* that, ironically, does not appear on the image itself, but which gets displaced to the photographer in its immobile situation as a spectator.

Andrade’s photographs have been read as “close and intimate” encounters that, so suggests Esther Gabara, lead to the dissolution of racial typology into a shared humanity that emerges from the mutual presence of object and subject.<sup>97</sup> Looking at the signs of his own presence left by Andrade in the images, Gabara argues that “he pictures the pain of the colonial encounter in his doubled position both in front of and behind the camera, as both the authorial subject and the powerless object.” (*Errant Modernism* 91) But the temporal reading I propose, instead of activating a politics of

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<sup>97</sup> She sees this, for example, in the photograph of an indigenous boy (“Tapuio de Parintins”), in which the boy’s face is blurred and not fully framed. As if captured in motion. (Gabara 2011, 89)

proximity that could redeem his position as an “internal colonizer” through a humanist closeness and “understanding”—while tacitly reviving the split between eye and body—, emphasizes how distance is *kept*, even under the desire of an impossible proximity. And precisely in this consists the political gesture. Through the latent, but not actual, movement, the spectator’s own presence gets destabilized by *duration as belatedness*—as opposed to an affirmative and capturing immediacy.

The cloud-like suspended and restricted (im)mobility of *looking* in the malarial gaze keeps time open in alterity. For Andrade, each medium exists in a relation of entanglement to one another—whose entanglement is actualized in the body of the beholder. Looking at an image meant, thus, to disavow the gazer’s epistemological power over the signifier through a regime of slowed gaze in intransitive waiting. The disidentification of the visual object with itself entails the disidentification of the looker with himself. The temporality of the medium and the temporality of the gaze merge.

In a 1934 article, published in *Espírito Novo*, it is through the mediation of the filmic image of Charles Chaplin that Andrade addresses this assemblage between slow gaze, body, and image. It shows how similar aesthetic experiences of looking are made possible by different media, opening up the immobile body of the spectator to difference. The image of Charlie's face, he writes, “gives the feeling of *a real man with the face of still drawing*, amidst equally real men with moving faces.”<sup>98</sup> (“Caras”

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<sup>98</sup> Esther Gabara, mistakenly, translates “cara de desenho parado” as “designed face,” (2008 95) which I translate as “face of still drawing,” in order to keep Andrade’s attention to the contradiction between movement and stillness. I keep, however, her suggestion of “visage” for *rosto*, and “face” for *cara*.

55, my emphasis) Again, the indetermination of moving is what calls Andrade's attention to the fact of mediation.

What is most admirable in the creation of Charlie's face [*cara*] is that all its effect is produced by the cinematographic<sup>99</sup> machine. Charles Chaplin has managed to give it an anticinegraphic quality, to which shadows and planes lack enormously. And it is mainly because of this that his face is comic in itself, violently contrasting with other visages [*rostos*] that appear on screen, and which we perceive as visages from real life. ("Caras" 55)

In the comparison between Chaplin and Buster Keaton, Andrade sees an inferiority of Keaton precisely at the moment of encounter between viscera, skin, and filmic machine: "[Keaton's aesthetic element] is not part of the structure of the face, does not come from the bone carcass, does not come from the flesh, the epidermis. And, much less, it does not come from the cinematographic machine." ("Caras" 57) Andrade praises an intermediality of the body: if the aesthetic element in Keaton does not originate from the materiality of his body, in Chaplin it is, at once, a product of the cinematographic machine and a corporeal element, one cannot be separated from the other. He sees in it an excess of medium and body: the *stillness* of drawing emerges from the *moving* image of film, causing bone and epidermis to equally pertain to the technical apparatus *and* to the body.

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<sup>99</sup> Gabara, mistakenly, translates "máquina cinematográfica" as "photographic machine," (2008 95) erasing the tension between the aesthetic effect of the two media that seems central to Andrade.

It is worth mentioning that drawing, the medium that Charlie bears on his filmic face, had for Andrade its own temporality. In a 1939 essay, published in the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* under the title “Do Desenho,” Andrade states that “drawing is an intermediary art between the arts of space and of time. [...] It is, at once, delimitating and without limits, antiplastic qualities par excellence.” (“Do Desenho” 71) Whereas, he argues, sculpture and painting are “material phenomena” which are limited both by their raw materials and physical framings as “a closed fact, which is constructed of their own interior elements, *entirely unrelated* to what to the statue and to the painting *would be the non-me*,” drawing is “antiplastic” because, having the line as its raw matter, it is entirely open to the relation with *what is not itself*, what is not contained in it. (“Do Desenho” 71-72, my emphasis) Andrade sees no separation between the drawing and its environment, the “me” and the “non-me,” not because he reduces drawing to mimetic realism, but, and he compares drawing with the hieroglyphs, because it is a sort of mimetic *analogy* in the Benjaminian sense: a sensuous copy, made in distance, whose core contains nothing but contact itself.<sup>100</sup>

The character of unlimited “open fact” of the drawing, Andrade argues, stems not only from its weightlessness—just as light to the photographic image, the line hides nothing behind its immaterial aspect, as opposed to clay, stone, or paint. On a 1940 essay on photography, he writes that “Photography is, above all, a fact of light, and it captures, so to say, unlimited fields.” (“O homem que se achou,” 80) Their lack of weight can open both to what is beyond their framed and material constrictions, evoking the open mobility of the cinematic framing. Both would be what Vilém

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<sup>100</sup> See Benjamin’s “On the Mimetic Faculty.”

Flusser calls an “in-object.” (see chapter 3) And precisely due to their openness, they are *transitory*: “painting always searches for elements of eternity, and therefore it tends towards the divine. Drawing, much more agnostic, is a way of *defining transitorily* (...) [it creates] the finites [*finitos*] of a vision, a movement, a gesture.” (“Do Desenho” 75)

Countering Belgium artist Jean de Bosschere’s devaluation of “natural peoples” by their expression in the medium of painting, a medium that would be attached to its natural materials, Andrade extends the temporality of the drawing to the “primitive body paintings”:

in the immense majority, these symbolic decorations of the primitive being are, such as the drawing, an open fact. It is not the natural limit of the face, enclosed by the hair and by the angle of the lower jaw, it is not the limit imposed by the chest, that close this body paintings, but rather they disseminate through face, body, with no principle of a closed composition. (“Do Desenho” 73-74)

The open and transitory nature of the drawing brings together Charlie’s face and the black-painted Indian in the photograph. Chaplin *plays* Charlie as a still drawing; and, painted black with jenipapo, the Indian *plays* the black person. The face of Chaplin and the face of the “blackened” tall Indian appear in relation also by the temporality of a process of (un)becoming analogies: one as the other, one as another. The image, in its temporality, can only exist once the spectator is halted in front of it in a *belated*, malarial gaze. Image *and* spectator both become intermedial experiences of opening, since they can only become inasmuch as they *unbecome* at the moment of mediation. Both sides become “open facts.”



In early twentieth century Brazil, the discourse on race, as historian Lilia Schwartz argues, brought together photography and scientific discourse as intertwined “closed facts” in order to trace the future of the country over questions of miscegenation.<sup>101</sup> The notions of process and unbecoming implied in racial miscegenation thus bore with it a negative idea of loss that haunted Brazilian elites, who would designate themselves temporal managers of the monolithic time of progress through biopolitical racial management. Whither the modernist (fetishizing) primitivism, or the eugenic whitening policies, both coincided in a paradigm that functioned through the imposition of a “historical” (white, modern) time over an “ahistorical” (non-white, primitive) one. If a theory of visual media emerges in Andrade, it is not one dwelling on the usual natural-artificial dichotomy, but on their interrelated capacity to rework time through bodily restriction of the filmic, malarial gaze, in which the modern, white, male gazer does not hold the epistemological power over the management and fixation of time.

It is not only that both in Chaplin and in the “blackened Indian” their becoming-image is their becoming-artifice, but what brings both together is also their capacity to displace movement by its virtualization through *inaction*, from the image to the body of the spectator. They evoke what Akira Lippit theorizes as “avisuality”: “not as a form of invisibility, in the sense of an absent or negated visibility: not as the antitheses of the visible, but as a specific mode of impossible, unimaginable visibility.” (Lippit 32) In this way, one can evoke the cinema not by the serialization of instants in

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<sup>101</sup> See Lilia Schwartz’s *O Espetáculo das Raças*.

some of Andrade's photographs, as many have read,<sup>102</sup> but by the call they make for the duration of the gaze and the virtual movement they withhold in suspension. As the filmic image emerges by analogy—Charles Chaplin, Richard Barthelmess—the filmic situation is evoked by the temporality of the engagement between spectator's body and image. The tension between framing and un-framing leading to an excess beyond the visible field appears as an unresolved relation between matter, artist, and spectator.<sup>103</sup>

“Art of the future? Maybe art of decay...” is how Andrade understood filmic aesthesis's relation to history, through its unearthing of the ongoing present as a disjointed relation between the lived time of the spectator, through the image, and the lived historical present.<sup>104</sup> (“Arte Inglesa” 191) If one remembers that, as Sheila Schwartzman shows, filmic spectatorship in São Paulo at the time was practiced by the upper bourgeois classes, the capacity of film to make the audiences experience “the inactivity of the fulfilled refusal,” as Andrade suggests, becomes a potential mode of discomforting self-critique. (“Arte Inglesa” 191) Instead of what Rei Terada calls “phenomenophilia” as a perceptual drifting attitude of turning towards the “merely phenomenal as an evasive maneuver” to open a “space before the acceptance of any given fact,” the drifting malarial gaze in Andrade points to the opposite of a postponed endorsement of the given, suggesting a suspension of its empty, modern capitalist flow.

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<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Lopez's widely followed reading. Also Martins and Gabara. Instead, I would suggest, serialization of the movement into still frames shows exactly the opposite of movement.

<sup>103</sup> See “O artista e o Artesão.”

<sup>104</sup> In this sense, his ideas on film prefigure somehow others such as Siegfried Kracauer's. See Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 2010.

*Distance and Slowness: Comparison and the Impossible*

Unlike his avant-garde peers in so-called “non-Western” spaces such as Oswald de Andrade, Tarsila do Amaral, Murayama Tomoyoshi, Jorge Luis Borges, and many others, Andrade did not undertake the traditional tour through European metropolitan centers.<sup>105</sup> A self-described anti-traveler, in the first draft for the preface to his travelogue, he frames his trip as overshadowed by a negative feeling of guilt that stemmed from an incapacity for experience itself: “My comprehension of landscapes, costumes, and men is processed always by a *comparative process* that, in this case, seems to me frankly wrong . . . The truth is that I'm travelling much around my own self, and selfishly applying my experiences instead of enriching myself with new ones.” (*Turista Aprendiz* 2015, 48)<sup>106</sup>

In spite of all the discomfort with the comparative process, felt by Andrade as an obstacle to experience, comparison does not cease to happen—and it does not prevent him from moving. As Andrade travels—and photographs—analogies keep appearing: one thing is seen *as* the other, terms are displaced. Filmic bodies, such as Richard Barthelmess, emerge in physical bodies, and imagined places emerge in actually lived spaces: “Belém is the main city of Polynesia. They sent Malay immigrants here, and from the space in between the mango trees Belém do Pará was born.” (*Turista Aprendiz* 1976, 63) Analogy seems just as undesirable as inescapable, a

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<sup>105</sup> In fact, Andrade never went to the Northern hemisphere metropolitan centers, his knowledge of it had always been mediated by images and readings of avant-garde journals and books. See Carnicel 1993.

<sup>106</sup> This passage appears in the latest re-edition of his travel writings published in 2015.

process that produces and inverts the binary opposition between physiognomy and feeling: “(...) Brazil, instead of making use of the Africa and India contained in it, wasted them, adorning with them only its physiognomy (...) We should think, feel like Indians, Chinese, people from Benin, Java.” (61) But through these unavoidable events of comparison, Andrade realizes that he is part of that same performative “physiognomy”: “I want to sum up my impressions of this trip. . . I can’t quite manage, I’m a bit stunned, astonished, I don’t know. . . there is a sort of sensation, stuck at insufficiency, of a mottling that ruins all the gray neat European that lingers within me.” (61)

Analogy is premised on the fact that things are *not* the same: they are *only* analogous. They make difference evident. But what wracks Andrade with guilt is not much that he experiences comparison as superficial analogies, as it could seem. Instead, the problem is that it is not superficial enough. Incapable of leaving this “comparative process,” Andrade also cannot exceed his own skin—while, nonetheless, at the same time, the skin is “mottled” and he realized the “gray neat European” interiority. The problem posed by the comparative process is not the fact that it incessantly takes place, but rather that he cannot fully enter its regime: he is held back in his European *interiority*, whereas he cannot help seeing the *other* as exchangeable images. His internal colonizing position comes into relief.

Andrade’s discomfort betrays the ambivalent position of someone who is always on the verge of fetishizing, and consuming, the “primitive” as an asset for the global “stage” of the avant-garde discourses, while at the same time bitterly realizing that he is also fetishized by the “central” metropolitan gaze. Being a representative of

the modernizing hegemonic classes of São Paulo, embedded in the speedup drive of the urban center and coming to research the truth of the country, Andrade's position runs the risk of embodying the colonizer in order to push back against the anxiety of being the colonized. His desire for the transitory temporal suspension of the malarial gaze in a cloud-like body is ultimately the desire to leave behind the paradigm of interiority into that of analogical relations: a desire that, he feels, he cannot fulfill. For Andrade, the problem is not that comparison reveals difference. The problem is rather that he encounters difference as unsurmountable: he feels compelled to an "experience" that would close the gap of difference, while this closure is impossible because his very experience can only take place for the "freely" moving bourgeois body "from the South."

The question that Andrade encounters is how to dwell on the impossible. The embodied experience of cinematic situation appears as a mode of suspension and tarrying that reveals the limits of proximity by the contagions between filmic screen, body, camera, and photographic image. The relation between medium, image, and body is a place of friction and dispute. If, as Hans Belting suggests in his "image-anthropology" (*Bild-Anthropologie*), "the human being is the natural *locus of images*, a living organ for images, as it were," (37) this dispute is less a "cultural" one, as he argues, but rather a material one. Material not because all bodies are different, but because they are differently addressed, in their difference, by the modern division of labor, capital accumulation, and, in this, of *movement*. That is when Andrade's embodied cinematic temporality comes to bear on the analogical photographic process: to make the gaze *endure* is to enter the embodied regime of comparison. To

experience the temporal depth of the power relations requires unmoving, to make movement recede and interrupt the avant-garde's modernizing speed, through the body and into the lived present in its inescapable belatedness. In other words, to be reminded, as Sobchack argues is the experience of film, that one *is* a body—and that a body is entangled in micropolitical relations.

Here I have read these images, along with his essays on aesthetics and film, as the site of a *temporal* tension, in which race—and “primitivism”—is read through/against the (non-) temporality that is imposed on the “primitive” by the hegemonic discourse, a position Andrade uncomfortably occupies. Instead of seeing them as a finished product that unproblematically responds to an avant-garde agenda<sup>107</sup>, I read them as something that troubles it through a media-theoretical approach of the body of the spectator, which entails a physical entanglement between the seer and the world seen. The primitivist agenda of Brazilian modernism pursued the discovery of the nation through the encounter of its original and ontological difference—the “primitive”—as an asset to carve its place in, as Eduardo Jardim writes, “the concert of the cultivated nations,” (Jardim 115) performing a double fetishism: of the “primitive” and of the “modern.” But Andrade's photographs seem to trouble this project in its aesthetic level: not necessarily as a response to his will, but sometimes also *in spite of it*.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> As an example of such an approach, see Canjani.

<sup>108</sup> What is usually called the “primitivist” or “nativist” phase of Brazilian avant-garde starts in 1924 with Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto da Poesia Pau-Brasil*. The narrative usually places the trip undertaken by Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade, Tarsila do Amaral, and French poet Blaise Cendrars to Minas Gerais, in the interior of Brazil, as the inaugural point—the “trip of the discovery of Brazil”—in which they start to research, in Eduardo Jardim's words, the “primitive element,” (115) as a means of placing Brazil in the world map of modern art.

Working in dialectical ways, both the camera and technical image produces a zone of indeterminacy and of negotiations of different restrictions (camera, image, subject), as Vilém Flusser has argued (see chapter 3), that will intervene directly into modes of embodiment and into possibilities of seeing. Moreover, it plays the role of a node to other images, imaginaries, and imaginations, and bodily situations. In this sense, instead of doing a programmatic reading of the images according to a preset agenda—or according to a clean-cut ontology of the medium, or of the photographer’s intention—the emphasis here was on the indeterminacy of the very act of looking, experienced on the frictions between a transnational, capitalist media, and a cinematic body that receives the experience of movement, without moving.

If, as Telê Ancona Lopez reminds us, Andrade’s project was to “ungeographicize” (*desgeograficar*) the modern mapping of the nation, the ambivalent and conflicting aspect of it lies in the intention of constructing a nation that would at once oppose—by the use of indigeneity—and fit into the world mapping. It is undermined by the very spatial terms of the comparison it is built upon. If he is “from the South” in world geopolitics, in the inverted local spatial hierarchies, being from the rich industrialized Brazilian South he inescapably embodies the ideal of modernity. The haunting spatial category of the modern, synonymous with that of the West, is dislocated by the shifting from spatial gaze to temporal experience: it is not a matter of place.<sup>109</sup> The need to imagine a different paradigm, temporal rather than spatial, made possible by the encounter with different media and their mediation in the non-encounters with the national meant, ultimately, the call for the annulment of his

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<sup>109</sup> On a discussion of idea of “Dislocation of the West,” see Sakai 2001.

position as an agent in the operation. An operation that revealed his entanglement in a violence that does not conform an event but that is revealed by its repetitive, slow procedure—the process of ongoing extraction, expropriation, and colonization—that left no space for an easy work of mourning.

Andrade's self-obliterating malarial gaze reveals an irresolvable question—the horizon of impossibility—that leads to his words in the speech I address in the opening of this chapter: "There is always some way to slip into an angle of vision, a choice of values, in the blur of a teardrop that swells the unbearable of the world's conditions," he writes, "and now I reach this consciousness that we have been rather out of date [*inatual*]." ("Movimento Modernista" 253) If to be stuck in an angle of vision leads to non-contemporaneity, it also means to be incapable of going past the "unbearable of the world" of which the gazer is an active part. The mediated cinematic situation, it seems, ultimately leads to a self-awareness in which the will to *action* appears as problematic because it is already premised in the structure of mobility (of capital and its bodies) he feels the need to disrupt, calling for imagining a different type of movement that could allow for an inactive engagement through *just looking*. In this process however, the melancholic attachment is revealed by the irresolvable loss of the subject's own image as a just agent; and of the image of the nation as a discoverable object.

*Looking* escapes the either/or relation that Ariella Azoulay describes as the usual political thought on the *gaze*, which proposes "the evacuation of the gaze from the realm of action and its consignment to the world of contemplation," (*Civil Imagination* 67) but it does so *not* in the way Azoulay suggests. She claims that



photography changed the status of the gaze in the political sphere because it brings spectatorship to a shared space of free assembly, by “sharing a certain space with other people and objects without having to be physically present beside them in the same place.” (*Civil Imagination* 68) She writes:

This new relation to the visible is in effect a new relation to the visual dimension of existence: it consists in a relation to objects, situations, customs, images or places that had formerly not been deemed worthy of viewing in their own right. It comes into being between people in the plural, in public space where the participant does not hold the stable privilege of remaining merely a viewer. Anyone present in shared space is at one and the same time the spectator of that which she sees and is exposed in her own right to the gaze of others. Such a relation to the visual deviates from the disciplinary gaze, just as it deviates from templates of communication that are known in advance. Its primary characteristics run parallel with action as Arendt defines it: no one has exclusive authorship over her own gaze. (*Civil Imagination* 68)

In what Azoulay calls a “practical gaze” enabled by photography, the premise of a space in which freedom of assembly can be equally enjoyed is paralleled by the freedom of movement that the reproducible image acquires. Subscribing to Arendt’s paradigm of *action* as premised on *freedom* and *plurality* of appearance in the public space, the image’s entrance in the political sphere, for Azoulay, does not address the unequal access to action, but rather rethinks the active role of the spectator. In the end, Azoulay’s new political ontology of photography works as a release from bad consciousness of the spectator, who can feel, in looking, as if they are acting. “A gaze that might parallel “action” in the sense that Arendt bestows upon the term” (Azoulay

*Civil Imagination* 68) is then, the opposite of what appears in Andrade's theory of the visual. For Andrade, it is *action* that needs to be discarded: the looked-at images and subjects want nothing of the viewer, and thus disrupt the very paradigm in which the act of seeing is initially invested, since the possibility of equality, as suggests Azoulay, is made impossible by the entanglement of the spectator.

Andrade's experience of the open temporality of the image shifts the power of the camera from photographer to the image: the temporal depth of the photographed imposes their presence onto the photographer/spectator. The legitimacy of the "legitimate Indian" is set under suspicion within the relation between performance of the subject, body of the observer, and the situation of looking at the image—much against the discourse embodied by the photographer's own presence behind the camera. This temporal openness of the technical image echoes, and reverts, what Vilém Flusser calls its "phenomenological doubt," flipping over the unequal relation between camera, spectator and image: the person behind the camera, or in front of the image, is stripped of their sovereignty and set into a state of undecidability about what they see, upon the realization that the same object can be seen from an infinite number ways. (Flusser 2000, 38) This dispute between closure and openness can be read as a crucial aspect in Andrade's ambivalent tone and conflicting consciousness over his own power as the avant-garde photographer-traveler.

Inaction, here, inverts Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" that Giorgio Agamben calls the "pure potentiality" of shattering the paradigm of will, which shows that "Our ethical tradition has often sought to avoid the problem of potentiality by reducing it to the terms of will and necessity. (...) The categories of the man of the law have no

power over Bartleby.” (254) The call for a “zone of indistinction between yes and no,” (Agamben 255) in Andrade, opened by the excessive absence represented by the technical image—“life out of life,” in his own words—leads to a process of undoing the categories of law not as exteriority, but in the realization that he, the avant-garde modernist from São Paulo, is also part of the apparatus of the law. In the malarial gaze’s intransitive waiting, looking without seeing implies not “preferring not to,” but it rather imagines the aporia of to “prefer not to prefer.”

In the theory of the mediated vision that emerges from this montage reading of Mário de Andrade’s photographs and writings, the political dimension of looking resides precisely on the possibility of *just looking*, a negative act that imagines the aporetic—and mediated—situation of the cinematic spectatorship of *still movement* devoid of acting, but rather as a state of *being acted upon*. It entails a self-obliteration that, albeit only imagined, produces a process of loss that resides at the center of the aporia of a “peripheral” avant-garde, which threw Andrade in a recurrent state of melancholic emptiness, between action and inaction, in the realization that the avant-garde is not the messiah, and neither it is to be saved.

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